

THE
S I C I L I A N.

A NOVEL.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.



BY

THE AUTHOR OF THE MYSTERIOUS WIFE.

The parent's partial fondness for a child,
An only child, can surely be no crime !
No : Care's a father's right ;—a pleasing right,
In which he labours with a home-felt joy !—

SHIRLEY.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
PRINTED AT THE
Minerva-Press,
FOR WILLIAM LANE, LEADENHALL-STREET.
1798.



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SICILIAN.

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—♦♦♦—

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As only child, can hardly be so cruel;
Not Carlo's father's right; — a pleasing sight,
In which he labours with home-fell joy!

CHITNEY.

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CHAP. I.

THE next morning proved almost as dull as the preceding one. The party at the Court sat longer than usual in the breakfast-room, rather undecided what to do with themselves. As it did not rain, the Chambers family proposed taking a short turn, and keeping the house in sight, by which means they should not mind if they were caught in a shower: the truth was, they were afraid, if

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they remained at home, the Duke would propose another game at billiards; and James was no more inclined to take his revenge, than the draper and his son were to back his superior skill! His Grace said, the clouds seemed breaking, and he thought it would clear. In that case, Mrs. Studeville declared her intention of taking an airing. "I hope you will favour me with your company, my dear little Alfred?"

The young Marquis had, as usual, breakfasted with the family, and was now playing about the room; at the Duke's request Mrs. Studeville had banished his title from her discourse, else she would not have addressed him with so little ceremony. He looked at his papa for an answer, who said, smilingly, "Alfred will be very happy if you will permit him to accompany you, my dear Ma'am; won't you, my love?"

"Oh! yes, papa, I will do Mrs. Studeville the favour," said the lovely boy, innocently meaning to be very polite. The Duke laughed, and the old lady was sorry she could



not express her prognostics upon the occasion, as the Duke had delicately entreated the very first day he became her inmate she would never compliment the child, "as, in his opinion, more good dispositions were spoiled by having their *bon mots*, or accidental little witticisms noticed, than by any other means." Children, so treated, soon begin to study to excite applause, and lose all the amiable interesting simplicity of their age, by endeavouring to be witty in hopes of being remarked. By way of changing the discourse his Grace reverted again to the weather, and was drawing a comparison between the climate of England and Italy, when Geoffry came in with a letter, which he presented to his Mistress.

"The person waits for an answer, Madam."

Mrs. Studeville, in strict conformity to the undeviating rule of Sir Yelverton, looked first at the seal, then at the direction; turned it again, and said, "From nobody of any great consequence, I presume, by their

making use of a head, to which any thing is preferable ; I prefer a cypher by far." — Waving her hand while she spoke, a sign the butler perfectly understood, and immediately obeyed, by retiring. She then put her hand into her pocket for her spectacles, but almost instantly recollecting the Duke was present, as suddenly withdrew it, saying, "As I am totally unacquainted with the hand-writing, I cannot suppose it contains any thing of importance ; so do me the favour to read it, niece ; your eyes are better than mine."

It was addressed to Mrs. Studeville, and ran as follows :—

"Madam,

"The bearer of this letter is a man who has met with misfortunes in the world, and who once had some claim upon your family ; but this he can no longer urge in his behalf : he is now at a time of life when a trifle would support him ; if you will admit him into your presence, he will explain himself more fully, he trusts perfectly to your satisfaction. If he
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is denied that honour, he will commit what farther he has to say to paper, though he would infinitely prefer a private interview: therefore hoping you will vouchsafe to see him, he begs leave to subscribe himself,

“Your most obedient humble servant,

“J. DIXON.”

Mrs. Studeville, as well as her guests, the Duke excepted, listened very attentively while Miss Vernon was reading. When she had concluded, the old lady, after a short pause, said, regarding her niece, who still held the letter in her hand, “I am surprised beyond measure — can’t at all conceive what this strange epistle means — misfortunes and claims upon my family! Thank heaven, I have no poor relations.” James, who was sitting very near her, sighed so loud that the old lady caught the sound, and gave him a very severe look; continuing her comments upon the letter, — “a particular wish to explain himself in my presence — what can such a person have to communicate that can induce him

to suppose I should grant him a private interview?"

These remarks were evidently meant to attract the Duke's notice, which his Grace observed, and was going to speak, but was prevented by Mr. Chambers bursting into a loud laugh: — "Why, my good Madam, can such a letter as that puzzle a lady of your great sense and judgment? Why it is a mere begging petition; bless you, 'tis as clear as my nose in my face! Lord help us, I have received hundreds such since I have been a housekeeper. The fellow wants to make you believe he is old; and what if he is, though that is a stale trick nobody is taken in by now-a-days; for, depend upon it, he is some impostor, has heard you are a single lady, for such rascals are as sharp as a needle, and so he thinks to take you in by some trumped up story about a cock, and a bull, and a roasted soldier; or else to frighten you out of a little money, whichever seems to suit his purpose best."

"Indeed,

"Indeed, Madam, I am of my father's opinion," said Robert; "this person, whoever he is, (and no doubt he is no better than he should be) expects you will grant him a private interview upon the strength of this letter, which is certainly meant to excite your curiosity; however, God forbid that you should be so rash! for heaven knows what might be the consequence were you to see him by yourself. Your hair would stand an end if I was to tell you half the stratagems that are put in practice by such sharpers in London."

The poor old lady turned pale, began to foresee she had had a very providential escape, and almost came to a resolution never to admit any stranger to a tête-à-tête in future. As the perturbation of her mind was very visible, James said, "Strange and wicked designs have often been put in practice by the means of fictitious letters: the writer of the one, now the subject of debate, was certainly not aware of your having company, Madam, or, in my humble opinion, he would have chosen a more

favourable opportunity for his visit; I really cannot, all things considered, advise you to see him."

"See him—no to be sure!—Mrs. Studeville has not taken leave of her senses yet," said old Chambers; "order him to be turned out of the house this moment, Madam. I hope the servants have not put him into a room by himself, or where he can lay his hands upon any thing."

"Oh! like enough that was his aim," said Robert, "for while he sent the servant in here you know, Madam, he might pop off ever so many things through the window, if any of his accomplices were handy: if they were missed before he made his escape, and he was to be searched, nothing would be to be found upon him, therefore you would not be justified in detaining him."

Thus did these three wise men construe a very simple letter into an object of serious alarm, and contrive by their foresight to terrify Mrs. Studeville into a resolution not to see the daring villain they presumed had brought it;

it; had they been more candid, they would freely have acknowledged they did not like the phrase "claims upon your family," because they thought it possible if the stranger made good his assertion, his *claims* might clash with their own; besides they were all interested in advising the good lady not to part with any money except to themselves; every gift was so much out of their own pockets in the long run.

The Duke, who had listened in silence, wishing to hear the sentiments of the company before he delivered his own, now spoke. "I cannot presume to contradict these gentlemen's assertions, respecting the various frauds practised in this country by artful designing villains, who live by committing depredations on the public; but, in your place, Madam, I would certainly see the writer of this letter: for, admitting his designs to be what those gentlemen suppose, you certainly cannot have any thing to fear in their presence, and in mine I give you my word of honour he shall not insult you with impu-

nity. It is surely not absolutely consistent with the golden rule, to condemn any one unheard; nor ought we, as I have ever thought, presume a person is guilty of a crime, merely because they are poor!"

This short but benevolent speech, delivered in the most persuasive accent, effectually dispelled every trace of dismay from Mrs. Studeville's countenance; she even became ashamed of the womanish fears she had displayed before the Duke, whose promise to protect her from any insult had also its due weight. Regarding him with the utmost complacency, she said, "Ring the bell, niece, his Grace is perfectly in the right; we are not justified in condemning this stranger till we have heard what induced him to address himself to me in this (I must call it) extraordinary manner."

The draper and his son were vexed and disappointed at this, to them, unexpected determination: "As you please, Madam," said Chambers, "you have certainly a right to do as you please in your own house; we may

be mistaken; we only wished to put you upon your guard, which was but natural, being a good deal more up to the tricks of sharpers in general, than either a lady like you, or my Lord Duke can be. However, I am always willing to hope the best; this here man mayn't turn out so great a rogue as we feared, and at worst, as my Lord Duke there says, you need not be afraid with so many of your friends about you."

Before Mrs. Studeville could reply, Geoffrey answered the bell, and was desired to shew the stranger in. He soon returned, introducing a tall elderly man, to appearance between sixty and seventy; his grey locks shaded his truly venerable countenance, which (to express ourselves in the words of a celebrated sentimental author), "was mild, pale, penetrating, free from all common-place ideas of fat contented ignorance, looking down upon the earth — it looked forwards, but looked as if it looked at something beyond this world." He was neatly though plainly dressed, and seemed as if he had lately risen

from a sick bed. The Duke, who had ever
“a tear for pity, and a hand open as day for
melting charity,” felt particularly interested
for the unfortunate stranger even before he
spoke, and thought if he was an impostor, he
had assumed a disguise perfectly calculated to
answer the end if he meant to excite charity.
Miss Vernon, who had now taken a seat near
the window, at which his Grace and Alfred
were standing, read the Duke’s thoughts in
his expressive countenance, and was happy
to find their sentiments perfectly coincided.
The stranger made a general bow as soon as
he had advanced a few paces within the room,
then addressed a more particular one to the
mistress of the house, whom he seemed to
know. The old lady was very much at a loss
what to say, particularly as she had every
reason to suppose the purport of his visit was
a demand upon her purse, which she was very
seldom much inclined to open; however, as
she had sent for him in, she reflected it was
incumbent on her to speak to him; therefore
after eyeing him from head to foot, she ad-
dressed

addressed him in the most frigid tone? "Pray, good man, who are you? How came you to take the liberty of addressing me? What claims can you possibly have upon the Studeville family? Your letter is altogether the most extraordinary one I ever received; I desire you will be explicit, and, if possible, pray explain your strange conduct."

Had the Duke given way to his feelings, he would have exclaimed, "Is this the way you distribute charity?—These are truly

I have a desire to see "The Spurns,

to see "That patient merit of the unworthy takes,"

As it was, he turned towards the window, while a sigh of commiseration escaped from his bosom, unheard by any but Miss Vernon, whose feelings were perfectly in unison with those he betrayed.

The stranger listened with the utmost humility, and a sort of placid resignation to these kind questions, and, when she paused, bowed once more, then said, "I was in hopes, Madam, I should have seen you alone."

to see Old

Old Chambers gave a loud hem by way of caution to Mrs. Studeville; but to have noticed him just then would have been in that lady's opinion lowering her dignity; she even assumed a more consequential air, while she replied, "I desire, Sir, you will briefly explain your reasons for thus intruding into my presence: here are none but friends of the Studeville family present."

The stranger once more bowed acquiescence, and thus began — "My letter, Madam, informed you I am in distress; and I think my looks confirm the truth of my assertion. Since you require it, I will be very explicit; and, in answer to the first question you honoured me with, give me leave to inform you, I am an unfortunate son of Sir Yelverton Studeville." — He paused upon perceiving the effect this declaration had upon the person to whom it was addressed, who had given a sudden start, half rose from her chair, grasped the arms, between which she hung for some moments suspended, as if bereft of her mental faculties; at last perceiving

ceiving the eyes of every one upon her, for the Duke had turned round when the stranger ceased speaking, she slid down again upon her seat by degrees, while her countenance gave his Grace an excellent idea of one of the Eumenides; indeed Tisiphone herself could not have displayed more wrath than this daring intruder seemed to have kindled in Mrs. Studeville's bosom. The Duke was obliged once more to turn his head to conceal a smile; the draper, who had advanced to the very edge of his chair, and sat quite erect, gave his hands such a smack upon his knees, that the noise seemed to restore the old lady by degrees to the use of her senses, and enabled him to catch her eyes; he gave her a wink, and shook his head significantly, as much as to say, "Mind you are not taken in by such a flimsy story." The rest of the party, the Duke and Miss Vernon excepted, were now eyeing this unwelcome guest with no great tokens of approbation. If Mrs. Studeville did understand the draper, she did not chuse to take any notice of his hints, but again fixed
her

her eyes upon the stranger. To be thus strangely, and in every respect unexpectedly, introduced to a brother whom she had never even heard mentioned before, might have affected stronger nerves than she possessed. Conscious had she attempted to speak during the first moments of her surprise, she should not have been intelligible, she prudently waited till she had recovered her breath, and was at last able to say, with a degree of warmth almost amounting to fury, "You are an impostor, man!" Had the draper dared, he would have exclaimed, "Well done!" as it was, he rubbed his hands, and looked round him, with a nod of self-sufficiency, meant to imply, "I knew I was right."

The stranger in the mildest accent said, "Why so ready to condemn, Madam? Suffer me to —"

"Man," said Mrs. Studeville, with increasing energy, "don't think I will allow you, or any person breathing, in my hearing to brand the name of Sir Yelverton de Studeville, my much-to-be-lamented father, with infamy?"

infamy? He never had a son, or I had not been mistress of this ancient seat ;” expressing by her looks a sort of dread she entertained that this newly-discovered brother was come to claim the pride of her heart, her dearly beloved court, as his own.

The draper thought he might now venture to put in his oar, convinced the old lady wanted the support of her friends, and he never was the one, he declared, to flinch upon such occasions. After a prefatory hem, he thus began—“ Look ye, my old chap, don’t you think to come here, and hum this respectable lady with your Canterbury tales about God knows what : you may be the Grand Turk, the Pope of Rome, or the Great Mogul himself, for any thing I know to the contrary ; but now you have come here, and are before people of the greatest consequence, mind you and speak to the purpose, or why—mark the end of it—that is all. So now please, without any more rigmrole rhodomontade nonsense, to tell us what your business is with Mrs. Studeville ; how you came to write her

her that queer impertinent letter;—and when we know all that, why we shall know better what to do with you;—but none of your flams as I said before, for mind I shall be down upon you.”

The stranger turning to the eloquent orator, “You have convinced me, Sir, it would be a very fruitless attempt to deceive you.” The Duke happened at that moment to let a book fall he had taken out of his son’s hand; Miss Vernon made an attempt to pick it up, by which means they both preserved their gravity; and the stranger proceeded:—“My story is very simple and very short, Sir,” still addressing the draper, “and I must acknowledge I am as much to be blamed as pitied. You have been polite enough to give me to understand I am addressing a gentleman of the first consequence; I will therefore be as concise as possible, as your time must be too precious to permit you to devote many minutes to an unfortunate old man.”

Unluckily the book fell again, but did not interrupt the conversation. Mr. Chambers,
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in a half surly tone, suspecting this shrewd rascal was laughing at him, said, "I did not mean myself when I talked of people of consequence, old fellow; but go on—let's hear what you have got to say for yourself."

"You are very obliging, Sir," resumed the stranger, "and as you have also informed me you mean to be *down upon me*, I will be as cautious as my weak memory will permit, of giving you an opportunity of displaying your talents." The Duke almost as much perplexed as he had been over night to conceal his inclination to laugh, threw up the sash, and put his son out to take a run upon the lawn before the window; he soon pulled it down again, and the stranger thus went on, addressing his discourse now wholly to Mrs. Studeville, and even turning his back upon the draper. "I have just reason, Madam, to revere the memory of my father, Sir Yelverton Studeville!—My mother was the chief attendant of your's, and died in your service some few months before the demise of Sir Yelverton; her name was Dixon;—she left

left this house, where the family then (as they generally did) resided, under pretence of ill health, while she lay in of the person now before you; after which event she returned into the family, without the real reason of her absence being even suspected, owing to the precautions she had taken. I was properly educated at Sir Yelverton's expence, and when I had attained my nineteenth year, was placed in a marching regiment: two years afterwards my father put me in possession of ten thousand pounds, commanding me at the same time, as I valued his love, or hoped for his future protection, to conceal his bounty, and our relationship. I strictly conformed in that respect to his will. I presume it would be needless to inform you, Madam, I was brought up under my mother's name, and entered the army as Mr. Dixon; but being very young when I became my own master, and still more imprudent, I soon dissipated all my ready money, and a short time afterwards raised some upon my commission. In a few years, from various motives, I sold out of the army,

army, just before the regiment I belonged to was ordered abroad ; but I was not aware of that circumstance at the time I disposed of my commission ; indeed both my father and mother thought I had accompanied it to Quebec, as I seized that opportunity to request a farther supply of ready money, and obtained from Sir Yelverton's bounty another thousand pounds. Ashamed of what I had done, I retired into Scotland, where I lent that sum, and two hundred pounds more, the small remains I had saved out of the wreck of my former fortune, as I apprehended, upon good security, and have till within this last twelve months lived upon the interest of the money : the unexpected failure of the house about a year ago, reduced me from a comparative state of affluence, to the lowest depth of misery. Adversity, it is justly observed, is the touchstone of friendship. I was soon forsaken by the few acquaintance I had made, and my efforts to support myself, unaccustomed as I had hitherto been to hard labour, first impaired my strength, then brought on a
severe

severe fit of illness, from which I am but just recovered, and which you must suppose, Madam, has reduced me to the greatest poverty. As soon as ever I was able to walk, I sat out, with a very few shillings in my pocket, and have travelled thus far in hopes your benevolence would induce you to bestow a trifle upon me, literally to keep me from starving, or having recourse to a work-house."

Mr. Dixon now ceased, and retreated nearer the door, to wait the event of his appeal to Mrs. Studeville's benevolence. Her eyes had been fixed upon the carpet for some time, the very idea of a natural brother having covered her with confusion. The draper kept fidgeting upon his chair, hemming, coughing, and making various other noises, to rouse the old lady from her apparent reverie. At last she raised her eyes, and looking at her brother, who though at a greater distance, still stood opposite, said in an audible whisper, "A very strange story indeed—very strange upon my word!" A

sigh

ligh seemed to ease her heart, oppressed with what she thought her father's guilt, and enabled her to raise her voice to its usual pitch; and continuing to address Mr. Dixon, she thus went on—"There is a bare possibility, Sir, of your story being true; you may leave the room for the present; I want time for reflection, and to consult my friends."

Mr. Dixon bowed to his sister, and cast his eyes round the room, wishing to discover what effect his artless tale had had upon his other auditors: he met the eyes of the Duke, who never listened to the misfortunes of a fellow-creature without melting into softness, and endeavouring to relieve them. As far as looks could express his meaning, he tried to console the unfortunate son of Sir Yelverton for the rude reception he had met with from the heiress of the Baronet's wealth. Few people are more quick-sighted than the unfortunate; the old man felt the Duke's kind intention; his eyes glistened; and, hastily withdrawing them from one of the most engaging countenances he had ever beheld,

beheld, he took a cursory view of the rest of the party, and left the room.

No sooner was the door closed after him, than Mrs. Studeville raised her eyes to heaven, then cast a most woeful look around her, in hopes some of her guests would undertake to rescue Sir Yelverton's fame from the obloquy Mr. Dixon had tarnished it with. The Duke, though few young men were more strictly moral in their principles, merely supposed Sir Yelverton's little deviation from the direct rule of right ought to be considered as *l'erreur d'un moment*, which he had sufficiently expiated by endeavouring to keep his imprudence a secret, and by providing so amply for the fruit of his private amours. He had not the slightest conception this venial trespass could appear so criminal in his daughter's eyes, as to strike her, as it really did, with the utmost horror; yet as he was unwilling to offer his opinion unless directly applied to, and being excessively hurt by Mrs. Studeville's behaviour during the preceding scene, he repaired again to the window to
look

look after his son; but though no father was ever fonder of a child, Alfred was not at that moment the object of his Grace's attention. Mrs. Studeville was very much disconcerted by his apparent indifference; after she had expressed a wish to consult her friends, he certainly ought to have made some remarks upon the strange visit she had received; she neither knew what to say, or whom to address, therefore began this soliloquy—

“Well, what I have been listening to is truly wonderful! Very extraordinary indeed!—But I really cannot conceive there is any truth in this strange story.” The Duke still kept at a distance, and by his attitude did not seem inclined to approach. This emboldened Mr. Chambers to offer his advice once more, as he thought himself included in the list of friends the old lady wished to consult: so with a kind of sneering half-laugh he began—

“Bless me, Madam, why I hope you an't taken in with such a flimsy story as the one we have just heard? Why, the Lord help

me, I thought you had seen through it all along, else I would not have let him off so easily I promise you: I warrant me if I had cross-questioned him a little, I should have made him sing to a different tune before he had known where he was—I would have had chapter and verse, no shuffling and cutting—no, no, if he had taken me in, he would have had but one more to cheat, I can tell him that: though he seems a sly old dog—may have been perhaps at the bar before now, for he seems to have the gift of the gab: however, as for all he has said, why it just amounts to nothing, and no more. He looks old, to be sure; so do I mayhap, but where's the upshot of that I should like to know? Would that be any proof I am Sir Yelverton's son, on the right or the left side either? No, no, that would never go down, though I might say so with a deal more truth, for you know, Madam, my poor dear Biddy —" A look of contempt Mrs. Studeville favoured him with prevented him from enlarging upon that subject; he therefore went on with some degree of hesitation.

hesitation — “ But that is neither here nor there, and talking as a body may say at random ; so all I have got to say upon this matter, Madam, would lie in a nut-shell—I was not born yesterday no more than yourself.” He soon perceived he ought to have omitted his last remark, so by way of atoning for his error, he went on—“ Though I am much your senior too, Madam, hearty and stout as I appear to be ;—but, to return to what I was saying, my advice, which I think myself in duty bound to offer, is, that you send this here old fellow a packing, for depend upon it no good will come of dilly dallying in such a manner, and letting him suppose you are taken in by his fine tale.”

The draper, having exhausted both his rhetoric and his breath, stopped. Mrs. Studenville seemed to wish to collect the opinion of every one present before she came to any resolution. The Duke just then called to his son. — How provoking ! she could not help thinking. James met her eyes, and said, “ Upon my word, Madam, I am very much

at a loss:" there he made a full stop, as, like his aunt, he wished to hear the Duke's sentiments before he delivered his own, because he would undoubtedly have been of the same opinion; this being one of the methods he had adopted of paying his court to Mrs. Studenville, and the Duke at the same time; but conscious of having made a beginning, he found it necessary to proceed. "There is a great deal to be said on both sides of the question, Madam; if this said Mr. Dixon is not the person he gives himself out to be, why, from what he has alledged in this honourable company, he has laid himself open to the laws of this country, which are very severe in this respect. Lord Chief Justice Coke says —" Here he was interrupted by the draper's exclaiming, "A fig for Lord Chief Justice Coke! look ye, James, you are studying, you say, for the bar; and you may, for aught I know, be up to some of the quirking tricks of the law, (no disparagement to your honesty), but you have to study how to deal with rogues, for half the lawyers in London an't

an't worth a bunch of dog's-meat:—Let me tell you, I ha'n't been a housekeeper in town and country for upwards of thirty years, served upon grand and petty juries, and all the parish offices, and been upon the Old Bailey juries nine times in my life, without knowing something. So now, Madam, give me leave to tell you, and I defy Mr. Counsellor there to confute what I say, if you relieve this here old fellow, it will be tantamount to acknowledging he is your brother; and the next thing he will lay claim to will most likely be your estate:—he may not be satisfied with saying he is your brother over the left shoulder, but may find people to swear his mother was married to Sir Yelverton, and that he was born in wedlock. You see what an old house you would be pulling about your ears! Here you might be hauled over the coals, and forced to give an account of every thing since the worthy Knight's, *Baron-night's* I mean—aye, since the worthy *Baron-night's* death! Lord help us! there are petty-fogging attornies enough to undertake

such a cause where there is so large a property at stake. So now, Madam, you must do as you like; I only tell you what may happen; God forbid it ever should!"

"God forbid indeed!" said Robert; "but if the man should be so wickedly inclined, he will find *qui tam* attornies enough in London to back his claim, and plenty of false witnesses into the bargain: so, Madam, let me advise you to be guided by my father—he speaks out of pure regard for your welfare; and though I say it that should not, I am sure there an't a more disinterested man living."

The old draper felt very much inclined to hug his dear Bobby for this well-timed compliment, while James chose to remain silent till he saw what effect their, as they thought, irresistible arguments had upon the spinster; who, but too easily persuaded not to part with her money, seemed to think, for the first time in her life, they spoke to the purpose. James, therefore, soon took his cue, not chusing to appear outdone by the draper in point of professional knowledge. "I was
going

going to observe, Madam, when Mr. Chambers interrupted me, quoting one of our most celebrated lawyers: however, Madam, not to wander from the point, namely, the strange visit you have just received;—though I can't conceive that any lawyer would undertake a suit of such importance upon such slender grounds, still, were you, by any considerable, or even inconsiderable donation, to relieve this stranger's supposed or real wants, he might certainly affirm you had, by such sum thus bestowed, endeavoured to stifle his legal claims; and I am perfectly of opinion, such an affirmation, given upon oath, might be productive of very serious consequences in a court of justice. There is no being absolutely aware how such a matter might end. And admitting he has no such evil intention, (though in law we always consider the possibility more than the probability of a thing), but, as I said before, admitting him to have no absolutely evil intentions, still if you merely relieve his present necessities, and do not continue to support him during life, he will

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certainly

certainly publish the story he told in our presence amongst your neighbours, by way of forcing you to stop his mouth with a sufficient gratuity to gratify any desires he may form." James perceiving what an excellent effect the conclusion of his speech had upon the old lady, and knowing how jealous she was of the honour of her family, allowed her time to reflect; but she instantly exclaimed, "Would he dare? Sir Yelverton de Studeville was too honourable a man to have formed such a base, wicked, scandalous connexion as he wishes to make us believe."

The Duke had turned about while James was holding forth, and found it impossible to conceal a smile, occasioned by the old lady's warm defence of her father; it neither passed unnoticed by the company, nor the spinster, who already hurt at his not having assisted her with his advice, was now seriously piqued. A smile at a moment like that was, to her, a convincing proof of the levity of his disposition. In a very haughty tone, meant to impress this volatile young nobleman with some degree

gree of awe for her superior notions of virtue, she said, "I can assure your Grace, your great uncle was a man of the strictest honour, and most refined moral principles."

The Duke, it has been already observed, was totally free from that pride of birth and rank—that common narrow notion of little minds—that wretched mistaken succedaneum of merit; still he never permitted any one, upon the strength of his affability, to take what he thought improper liberties; he therefore replied, in a tone so like the old lady's, that it made her severely repent having so addressed him, "I don't doubt it, Madam; but allowing every word the stranger said to be true, I cannot perceive his story at all impeaches either Sir Yelverton's honour or morals."

Mrs. Studeville plainly perceived she had gone too far; yet did not know how to retract with a good grace; besides such doctrine by no means suited her refined notions of honour and morality: and had she had courage, she would have undertaken to dispute

the point with this proud young fellow, for such she now thought him; but to offend a man whose title and high descent reflected such honour even upon herself, and at the very moment he had appeared upon the horizon, (as she would have said), a man her uncle looked up to with respect and reverence, and who would never forgive her, she was certain, should a breach between her and the Duke arise from her zeal to vindicate Sir Yelverton's character—reflections like these enabled her to say, with assumed composure, while she shrunk abashed from the Duke's piercing glances, "This is too delicate a point for me to dispute with your Grace, as our notions seem to differ in many respects." She paused, but receiving no answer, conceiving the Duke seriously offended, her compunction increased; she was perfectly sensible of her error, yet totally at a loss how to deprecate his just anger, though more than ever incensed against the unfortunate Mr. Dixon, whom she looked upon as the primary cause of her present mortification. She

at

at length declared her intentions: "As I am by no means satisfied, I shall send this man about his business, unless he gives me some stronger proof than his bare asseveration of the truth of what he has advanced; but that I am convinced is impossible."

The draper could hardly conceal his triumph, and blessed the old man in his heart, hoping his visit would occasion a quarrel between the Duke and Mrs. Studeville, and as he saw "the mettlesome spark," as he called him, could not swallow the prudish old cat's bitter pills so easily as he was obliged to do, he was in hopes his Grace would take pet, and leave the Court in a huff. Determined if possible to work the old lady up to give him another *slica*, as he termed it, (perceiving, as he afterwards told his family, the great man found it very difficult to digest the first) "Indeed, Madam," said he, "you are perfectly right: there is nothing made so much of as a scandalous story; every one is sure to give it a lift, and I should not wonder if folks were at last to say this here vagabond was

a son of your's instead of Sir Yelverton's." The old lady started with horror at the bare supposition; and he proceeded—"My Lord Duke is pleased to say it is no disparagement to any man, married or single, to have a bastard child: no more it might in Italy, but John Bull looks upon virtue and morality as the strongest bulwarks of our glorious Constitution. Be that as it may, Madam, if you will permit me to undertake this strange visiter, I will soon rid you and the neighbourhood of such a troublesome fellow." As he received no negative to his request, he immediately left the room to execute what he construed into her orders.

A sort of gloomy silence prevailed during his absence. The Duke called to his son, and took him in, as he had put him out of the window, then looking at his watch, seemed undecided whether he should wait the draper's return, who soon came in with a letter in his hand—"I an't been able to get shut of him yet, Madam; the old fellow is rather crusty, and insisted upon my shewing you
this

this here dirty paper before he quitted the house; so not to make a bustle among the servants, why I brought it in; shall I give it you between the tongs, for I am sure it is hardly fit for a lady to touch?"

— Mrs. Studeville did not accept his considerate offer, but put out her hand to receive the letter, which was by no means so dirty as the draper wished to give her to understand: the date accounted for its colour. She first glanced her eyes over the seal, part of which still remained, gave a sort of jerk with her hand, and her surprise increased visibly when she turned to the direction. No longer scrupulous before the Duke, she put on her spectacles to read the contents to herself, and pondered over the few lines the letter contained for several minutes; seemed very much confused during her reverie, and at length folded up the letter, and replaced her spectacles; but thinking, after what had passed, it would appear odd to make a secret of what she had been reading, she looked at the draper, who was anxiously waiting her orders, and

and said, "Did Mr. Dixon tell you, Sir, from whom he received this letter?"

"It would explain itself, he said, Madam."

"I must own the hand-writing bears some resemblance to that of Sir Yelverton's; it is also dated from the Court; Messieurs C—— were certainly my father's bankers, and are mine;—I am more than ever at a loss what to think."

"Why, Madam, I thought the old fellow had some other trick in store to play off, if occasion offered. He had layed his plan tolerably well, and seems armed, as a body may say, at all points. But this letter is as much a take in as his fine story; he told me, if I understood him right, Sir Yelverton sent it him with the draft he mentioned; but, as I told him, "Old birds are not to be caught with chaff." I dare say the scrawl has been written by some of his accomplices in the plot; some old servant, mayhap, who might have some of Sir Yelverton's writing by him; so it was easy enough to copy the hand, and

and it was a damned good finishing stroke to their fine scheme."

Mrs. Studeville, but too conscious neither her conduct nor address to himself had met the Duke's approbation, was excessively anxious to reinstate herself, if possible, in his good opinion; and thought she could not take a more effectual method than to intreat he would favour her with his opinion in the present juncture; therefore looking at the draper, said, "You may be right in your conjectures, Sir, but are full as liable to be wrong;" then putting out the hand in which she held the letter towards the Duke, "Will your Grace do me the favour to peruse this short epistle, and honour me with your advice when you have looked it over?"

The Duke advanced, and took the letter, which he read attentively. The draper and his family were very much offended with the old lady for not having at least desired this favoured Duke would read the letter aloud, that they might sit in judgment upon the contents, as well as this great man.

"Pray

“Pray what does your Grace think?” said Mrs. Studeville, seeing the Duke had finished. Without positively answering her question, his Grace said, “If this is a premeditated scheme to excite your charity, Madam, or meant to answer any other purpose, it has been, I should suppose, some years in agitation; for this letter evidently was not written yesterday;” returning it as he concluded with a distant bow.

This was speaking in such indefinite terms the old lady hardly understood his Grace’s meaning, and Robert, ever eager to give his opinion, said, “Lord, Madam, I dare say the old man has got a dozen such letters which he produces when occasion serves; why a letter may be as much worn in a week as in seven years.”

“To be sure,” said the draper, “its being so yellow is owing to its having been smoked for that purpose; and the ink had vinegar put to it to give it that pale cast: Have not you heard of a hundred tricks being played with ink and paper, James? They are common enough

enough in your profession, though I don't say you ever had recourse to such base methods."

James said, "he believed there were means to give both any appearance it might suit the writer's purpose they should assume."

"There, Madam," said the old fellow, "now if I was you, I would fling the dirty smoke-dried scrawl into the fire, and send the owner of it about his business."

"I hope, Sir," said the Duke, "Mrs. Studeville does not mean to follow one part of your advice, as, in my opinion, no one has a right to destroy the property of another: the few lines that paper contains may be of inestimable value in the eyes of Mr. Dixon for any thing you know to the contrary."

"As your Grace has read it," said the draper, "you are certainly the best judge of its intrinsic value. I never set any store by a letter myself, except it contains a receipt, or an agreement: however, I don't want to burn this one; I sha'n't be the richer for throwing

throwing it into the fire; so, in God's name, let the right owner have it again say I."

"My sentiments perfectly coincide with your Grace's," said Mrs. Studeville, in a very penitential tone, "I should most certainly neither have committed this letter to the flames myself, nor suffered it to have been thrown into the fire in my presence. Whoever the poor being is, he appears to be in want, and I have so many respectable witnesses of my real intentions, I think I can have nothing to dread from sending him a trifle. His improbable tale I shall never credit; indeed the more I examine the writing of this letter, the less I am inclined to believe it was written by Sir Yelverton; and, at all events, who can venture to say this stranger is the person to whom it was addressed?"

"Why, as you very justly observe, Madam," said Mr. Chambers, "he may have stole it: however if that an't the case, no doubt it is a base forgery from beginning to end, and there would be no end of bastard relations, if you was to countenance a story of

of such long standing; the Lord have mercy on us, they would spring up like mushrooms from all quarters! But, as you say, let the old Don be what he may, he may be in want. I am, God knows, always as ready to relieve the distresses of the poor and needy, as to punish vagrants; besides, Madam, if we make a collection for him, it will prevent his making a handle of your generosity: there (flinging down a shilling upon the table while he was speaking), there, let every one give what he chuses, now I have made a beginning."

His son, two daughters, and Mr. Vernon, followed his generous example. Miss Vernon blushed deeply when she saw what the boasted collection was likely to amount to; as she dared not give way to her own generous disposition upon the occasion, she kept fumbling for her purse, wishing to see what addition her aunt and the Duke meant to make;—the former counted five shillings with the greatest deliberation, and the Duke taking out his pocket-book, once more turned towards

wards the window. More hurt than astonished at her aunt's want of liberality, though as the proposal had originated in herself, she had hoped she would upon such an occasion, and in such company, have made her shillings guineas, not wishing to offend, Miss Vernon laid down a half-crown piece. During this time the Duke was making memorandums : the draper waited till he had done, then taking the money from the table, walked up to him, "What does your Grace please to give?" shewing him the collection while he spoke.

"I cannot say, Sir, I feel myself so charitably inclined as the rest of the company seem to have been," said the Duke.

"Oh! your Grace means to joke," said old Chambers; "why, as we all think the fellow an impostor, we have been very bountiful considering."

"Infinitely more than I should have been," rejoined the Duke, "had I entertained the same opinion. You must excuse me, Sir, I cannot follow your excellent example."

"Faith

"Faith I believe your Grace is in the right," said the draper, "and the wisest of us all at last. You find, Madam, the Duke thinks us all to blame for being charitable to such a fellow!"

"Indeed," said Mrs. Studeville, "I fear," she meant to have added he, is an impostor; but recollecting that would be admitting it was possible Sir Yelverton had had a bastard son, she turned it off with a hem, and, "this is not his first attempt; he is certainly stricken in years."

"Aye, and you may add iniquity, Madam," said the draper.

"Well, Sir, you may be right: I do not think it a meritorious action to relieve such people."

"Not it truly, Madam," replied the draper, "but we give this trifle to rid your house of such vermin; so pray give me his smoke-dried letter, and let me send him a packing," leaving the room, as he had got the letter for that purpose.

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The Duke stood apparently examining the weather, while Mrs. Studeville sat lost in reflection. His Grace certainly neither approved her former nor present behaviour; but whether he now thought she had been too bountiful, or the exact reverse, she could not determine. He might be hurt at her following the advice of people she had repeatedly told him she despised; she felt her suffering their persuasions to influence her conduct, was very inconsistent with such declarations; how therefore could she account for such a versatility of disposition to the Duke, who seemed unusually thoughtful, which particularly hurt her, as she conceived herself to be the ultimate occasion of his gravity?

In about five minutes Mr. Chambers returned, with "I believe the old fellow is either gone, or upon the tramp, Madam; faith he had some difficulty not to be impudent, only he prudently thought of the consequence before he gave a loose to his tongue; however, he took the money, and said it would serve to carry him part of the way

back to Scotland: so I told him he had only to play off a few more of his fine rhodomontade stories upon silly old women."

This was a sort of slip of the tongue which he was not aware of. Mrs. Studeville made no answer, as the Duke, taking his son in his hand, left the room. This was so convincing a proof, in her opinion, she had offended almost beyond forgiveness, that she neither knew what to say or do. His Grace might have asked when she meant to go out, as he had agreed, before this unwelcome visiter's appearance, Alfred should accompany her on an airing; but now, all things considered, she seriously began to fear he meant to leave the Court.

While she was making these reflections, Mr. Chambers, who was upon the look out, as he called it, to see which way the old fellow would take, saw the Duke crossing the lawn, his son running before him. — "So, Madam, there goes the great man! It wasn't so polite, in my opinion neither to say 'hog or dog, will you go with me?' nor not to give

give a single farthing to the old beggar after you had been so bountiful, Madam. Well I suppose his Grace is not so well able to afford it; let us hope so at least."

Mrs. Studeville, angry with herself, and with every body else, rose from her chair, looked after the Duke, with difficulty suppressed a sigh, then said, "I shall not take an airing to-day:" and left her guests to dispose of themselves how they pleased.

CHAP.

CHAP. II.

MRS. STUDEVILLE went into her dressing-room, which she paced for some time, putting on her spectacles to take a better survey of every figure she discerned at a distance, in hopes each succeeding one was the Duke upon his return, and was constantly disappointed in her expectation. She looked at her watch every three minutes—time crawled; nay she was half tempted sometimes to think her watch had stopped; at last it grew so late she thought she must set down to her toilette, except she meant to dine *en dishabille*,

disbaille, a thing she never did when well: she therefore rung her bell. If it had not been one of her ~~invariable~~ rules never to be interrupted when she was alone, she might have been sooner relieved from her disagreeable state of suspense; as it was, Miss Vernon and Mrs. Tabitha Wilson made their appearance almost together.

"Is the Duke returned, niece?" was the first question.

"No, Ma'am," was the answer. "I came to inform you his Grace sent his compliments, and begged you would not wait dinner for him, as he was going to Bristol, where he expected to find letters which might require immediate answers, therefore thought it most likely he should not return before evening."

"Indeed!" said the old lady, in a voice that seemed to imply all her fears were realized, as she instantly thought he had left the Court never to return, and was perhaps gone to the Wells, where he would take lodgings if he thought Neville House would be too solitary during Lord Fortrose's absence. She kept these

these disagreeable reflections to herself, only asked, "Why was not I sooner made acquainted with his Grace's intention of dining out? With whom did he leave this message?"

"Jonathan, Ma'am," said Miss Vernon, "met his Grace upon the downs; he sent this message, and the young Marquis home with him, and desired him to send his groom and horses after him; he meant to proceed slowly across the downs."

"Oh! my little Alfred is returned then?" said the old lady, her countenance brightening as her fears began to subside. "I suppose his Grace did not think of these letters before he went out; make haste, Wilson, I want to go down to see the child; if I had known of his return, I should have taken him out an airing."

"I thought you were busy, Madam," said Miss Vernon, "or I should have let you known sooner."

Mrs. Wilson seemed very full of something which she longed to communicate to her

her mistress, but was at a loss how to begin: she had not seen her lady since she went down to breakfast, and hardly now knew how to enter upon the subject she was so anxious to discuss, till her mistress "wished she had known the Duke would not dine at home; but it does not matter." Miss Vernon easily guessed there would have been some alteration in the bill of fare.

Mrs. Wilson, eagerly seizing the opportunity, said, "I suppose, Madam, his Grace stopped so long with the old gentleman, he found he should not be able to get back in time for your dinner-hour."

"What old gentleman?" said Mrs. Studeville peevishly.

"Nay, Madam, for the matter of that, I am sure I can't say who or what he is, only, like Geoffry and the rest of us, I thought it mighty odd; we could not stop our ears you know, Madam, and I am sure we could not all be mistaken."

"What does all this mean I should like to know?" said Mrs. Studeville.

“Why, Madam, I only mean that the old gentleman who came here this morning came into the steward’s room again, where he had waited while Geoffry went in with the note he brought, when he came out of the parlour; and so, Madam, we asked him if he would not take something, because he looked so bad;—he was very civil, and thanked us very much, but said he was not so inclined. However, Madam, he sat down by the fire, for Mr. Nelson, my Lord Duke’s valet, made way for him; indeed I must say, both him and the other gentleman out of livery, the Italian, are as well bespoken young men as any body would wish to meet with on a summer’s day:—But, to go on with my story, Madam, the old gentleman said, looking at Mr. Nelson, ‘Pray, Sir, are you in Mrs. Studeville’s service?’ So to be sure he answered, and with a fine bow, ‘No, Sir, I am in his Grace the Duke de Ferrara’s suite.’ So the old gentleman said no more to him just then, but asked me, Madam, who that handsome young gentleman was in the parlour,

lour, who had got such a lovely little boy? So, Madam, Mr. Nelson said, 'He is my Master, Sir, one of the greatest men in all Italy, and one of the best in the whole world.' You can't think, Madam, how much all the Duke's servants stand up for his Grace! Why they say he is like a prince in his own country, and keeps such a heap of servants; I am sure, by their account, they an't overworked. But just as Mr. Nelson had done speaking, who should pop their heads in amongst us but Mr. Chambers, Madam; so says he, 'A word in your ear, old fellow.' So the gentleman got up, and they talked together in the passage, and seemed like at high words we thought; but the gentleman soon came back, and took his seat again. But while he was asking Mr. Nelson some questions about foreign parts, and the like, in bounces Mr. Chambers, and made us all stare like any thing! for, says he, 'Look ye, old man, your letter is all of a piece with your fine tale, and let me tell you, if you go about the country saying you are Mrs. Studeville's brother,

ther, bastard or not, mind ye me, why I will have you put in Bristol jail." So then, Madam, seeing us all look astounded, as well we might, he gave him some money, which I must say the gentleman looked very scornfully at; however, Madam, you know best whether Mr. Chambers told truth. I am sure the gentleman neither said who he was, nor what he was, nor we did not ask him."

Mrs. Studeville looked as she felt, very angry, while she said, "Was there ever such a prating officious fellow as that Mr. Chambers, Grace? — But pray what else did you hear, Wilson? I suppose this strange visiter has afforded ample subject for conversation among my household."

"Why, Madam, to be sure, as I said before, we could not stop our ears, whether he was your brother or not."

"I ask you," said the old lady in a pet, "what else Mr. Chambers said to the old man: now do you comprehend me?"

"Certainly, Madam. 'Why,' says he, 'if Mrs. Studeville had followed the advice of

the greatest gentleman in the room, you would have been made an example of, my old chap; and I promise you, well as he could afford it, none of this is his money! So bless your stars to think you are likely to get off so well.' However, Madam, we all thought Mr. Chambers had cracked rather too much there, and Mr. Nelson as good as told him so; and as soon as Mr. Chambers's back was turned, he offered the old gentleman a guinea out of his own pocket, assuring him he could very well spare it, and he was sure if his master thought him really in want, he would do something handsome for him; and said ever so many kind things to him. The poor old gentleman was ready to cry, I can assure you, Madam: however he took the money, and went away, and if we had not been fearful you might have been angry, Madam, we should have made up a little matter more for him among ourselves."

"You were all mighty charitably disposed," said the old lady, in a greater pet than before; "the Duke's valet must have pretty

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pretty good wages to be able to bestow guineas upon beggars!—Pray what has all this long preamble to do with what you first told me, that the Duke had stopped with this old man?”

“Why, Madam, Jonathan as he was coming home a-foot from Bristol, saw his Grace and the Marquis walking backwards and forwards upon the downs, close to the park wall, with this very old gentleman for a good while before he came near them; and when he did, he took off his hat to the Duke to be sure, you know, Madam, who gave him the message Miss Vernon has repeated to you, Madam, and begged he would lead the Marquis home, and send his horses after him, and then, Madam, Jonathan said he bowed to the old gentleman, and walked forward; and as soon as he was out of hearing, the old gentleman who had stopped behind, asked Jonathan if he did not belong to you, Madam, and shewed him ten guineas the Duke had given him, he said, and asked him if he ever knew you give away such a sum

of money at a time; nay offered to give him a guinea if he could swear you ever had. To be sure, Madam, I must say that was being very impudent, and I an't sure if Jonathan did not tell him as much; but as he was in a hurry to get home to send my Lord Duke's horses after him, why he soon left him: however, as we all said, to be sure Mr. Nelson had not given his master a good character for nothing, and he declared he was better pleased than if his Grace had given the money to himself, because it must shew us all how wrong Mr. Chambers had been."

Had Mrs. Wilson particularly wished to mortify her mistress, she could not have succeeded more effectually: she was no longer at a loss to guess which the Duke condemned, her parsimony or her liberality! Humbled, fretful, and displeased, she soon dismissed her Abigail, and telling Miss Vernon she was not very well, owing to having been flurried by that strange man's strange story, desired her to go down and do the honours in her stead; she would dine in her dressing-room

room, but begged she would either bring or send her dear child to her the moment she had dined; she should order some sweetmeats and fruit to be brought up stairs for him.

When Miss Vernon joined the party below, and gave in her report, the old draper fairly capered about the room. "It will do, boys," he exclaimed, "it will do, my lads! Oh! the physic works bravely! Madam has got the *maw whew* already you find; and the pills she gave Don Pompous sticks in his gullet yet. I begin to think the fellow is not so poor as one might imagine, for he has got a plaguy proud stomach of his own, a damned deal of grand-dad in him, let me tell you; he gave the old prude one of her own looks: why he shewed her the odds of treating him as she does us. Well, I commend him for his spirit. How muttonish the old woman did look, to be sure, when he set her down so nicely. — Lord! Lord! I could have kissed him with all my soul! — I only hope he is gone for good."

Miss Vernon neither chose to raise nor depress his hopes. From the Duke's having sent his son back to the Court, she was convinced he meant to return himself—for how long she could not pretend to determine; though she sincerely hoped her aunt's behaviour, which she condemned as much as he could do, would not induce him to leave the Court before Lord Fortrose's return: perhaps had she entertained any hopes of her passion being returned, the esteem she felt for this truly amiable young man might in a short time have ripened into a more tender sentiment: as it was, she thought

"It were all one,

"That she should love a bright particular star,

"And think to wed it: he was so above her!"

Though, to speak in the language of our beautiful bard, like Desdemona, she could have said,

"She wished heaven had made her such a man."

As it was, she felt a sort of reverence for him. His generosity towards the unfortunate Mr. Dixon made a deep but agreeable impression upon

upon her mind; it was such a convincing proof of the philanthropy of his character. Indeed it might be truly said of the Duke, that when he relieved the wants of his fellow-creatures,

"Careless their merits, or their faults, to scan,"

"His pity gave ere charity began."

As the gentlemen seemed inclined to enjoy themselves over the bottle, knowing they should not see Mrs. Studeville before supper, if they did then, Miss Vernon soon went in search of her favourite little Alfred, with whom she joined her aunt. Had Mrs. Studeville given way to her natural curious disposition, she would have questioned the young Marquis about what passed between the Duke and Mrs. Dixon; but fearful he might mention the circumstance to papa, she dared not make the attempt. Alfred, whose innocence made him irresistibly engaging, soon reminded her that she had not taken him an airing; she pleaded in excuse not having been well, and that she thought he had been gone to Bristol with papa, and by way of making him amends for

through 2 his

his disappointment, played at domino with him till the Duke returned, which he did just at dusk. Mrs. Wilson came in to give her mistress the welcome information at the moment his Grace was passing the dressing-room door, in his way to his own room. Alfred sprung out to meet him; and Mrs. Studeville solicited him so politely to favour her with his company to tea in her dressing-room, the Duke promised to comply. She also entreated he would not think of altering his dress; and if he took off his boots, hoped he would just put on his slippers; he therefore obliged her in the latter article, which she protested she took as a particular compliment; in short, tried by every means in her power to atone for the petulance she had displayed in the morning. The momentary displeasure the Duke had felt, had long since vanished: indeed few men ever made greater allowances for the infirmities of human nature, and, upon reflection, he thought no sensible person could blame the poor old lady for wishing to defend her father's character; and though

though he still thought her very deficient both in feeling and generosity, as one of his greatest sources of happiness arose from the liberal use he made of a princely fortune.

At supper, Mrs. Studeville being an invalid, entered the eating parlour leaning upon the Duke's arm. The draper whispered Robert (while his daughters were inquiring how Mrs. Studeville found herself,) "What, made it up already! He is as poor as Job, damme!"

Little of moment passed during supper, and the old lady retired sooner than usual:—the Duke followed her example; the draper gave them both a few of his *blessings* before he turned in, as he called it, asking Robert and James if they remarked the Duke's slippers: "Yes, damme," he went on, "I dare say she would have allowed us to have taken such a liberty! Upon my soul I believe this great man might sham mad, and dance naked before her, if he chose." He then grumbled out a general good-night, which was the signal for the party to retire.

CHAP.

though he had thought her very deficient both in feeling and generosity, as one of his greatest faults was from the

At supper, Mrs. Studeville being an inveterate

CHAP. III.

The Duke's son. The dinner whistled Robert (while his daughters were looking how Mrs. Studeville looked) at what made it up already! He is as poor as Job.

THE next morning being very fine, the Duke ordered his horses as soon as breakfast was over. Mrs. Studeville, as has been observed, never went out till half past twelve, but at that time hoped to have her young favourite's company. His Grace readily agreed, but hardly thinking an airing in a carriage sufficient exercise for the child, said he should send him to take a run upon the downs for an hour with one of his servants, previous to her going out. Alfred enjoyed the thoughts of that more than of a ride with the old lady;

CHAP.

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he accompanied his father into his dressing-room when his Grace went to put on his spurs, who then told his valet to take him out for an hour; as Nelson was the only Englishman, grooms excepted, his Grace had in his suite, though several of his other servants spoke the language, he preferred putting Alfred under his care when he sent him abroad. This man had been appointed by the Duke to attend his father, upon his Grace's marriage, and had acquitted himself in that post so much to his present master's satisfaction, he at Mr. St. Aubyn's death took him, at his own request, into his service, as principal valet, which office he still retained. Alfred, ever anxious to enjoy as much of papa's company as he could, walked, or rather jumped down stairs with him, and as the Duke's horses were not brought round, he desired Nelson to send them after him, and walked forward with his son till they reached the corner of the park wall, where his Grace stopped to survey the numerous male and female equestrians taking the air upon the
downs

downs, as that corner was the usual termination of their ride that way. Indeed, as if by mutual consent, carriages, horsemen and women, all turned about at that spot perhaps a dozen times in the course of their airing. His Grace admired seeing English ladies on horseback; several passed him while he was talking to his son, whom he put under Nelson's care as soon as his horses arrived, and as he was not actuated, as most of the parties upon the downs were, by a desire of being seen, he turned down a road which led to an adjacent village, and thus lost sight of the fair Amazons and roanish bucks, exhibiting their graces while they breathed the invigorating air the environs of Bristol are renowned for.

Alfred walked forward with his guide, and in imitation of the Duke, had a vast many remarks to make upon the ladies and their horses. His Grace, after a long ride, did not return to the Court till near three; Alfred always dined at two, and spent the intermediate space between his own and the family dinner in the Duke's dressing-room, who was
anwob generally

generally at his toilette about that time. He had finished his dinner some time before his father came home, and was impatiently looking out for him: when the Duke returned, he ran to meet him, calling out, "How long you have staid, papa, the great bell has rung once."

"Then I must make the more haste," said the Duke.

He next asked, "where papa had been; what he had seen; then "Oh! papa, did not you see that pretty lady upon the dowsy that rode so well, and had such a nice horse?"

"What already a connoisseur in lady's beauty, Alfred?" said the Duke with a smile, "I cannot say I remarked any lady in particular."

"Now indeed, papa, you said she rode very well, and was well mounted."

"Very likely I might make the remark you mention, but I cannot say I was struck with her handsome face as you seem to have been."

Because

"Because you did not see her face, papa; when she cantered past us, she sat the other way; but indeed she was very pretty—Nelson said she was."

"I should not have been so impolite as to dispute the point with you," said the Duke, "I have too high an opinion of your taste and judgment! But how came she to make such an impression upon your mind? Miss Vernon is a very handsome lady, and many more you have seen, yet I never observed you so eager to assert their claims to beauty."

"Oh! Miss Vernon is very pretty, to be sure, papa; but this lady got off her horse, and had it led about while she talked to me, and told me I was a sweet fellow, and kissed me when she took leave of me. Oh! I cannot tell you half what she said to me, papa."

"At all events I find you do not chuse to be outdone in courtesy by this fair stranger," said the Duke, laughing; "she told you, as any other lady equally unacquainted with you, would have done, that you were a fine

fellow, and a handsome boy, because continual exercise has rendered you active and stout for your age, and a good state of health has given you a colour; but in a few years hence you will not be quite so much flattered by the epithet, 'sweet fellow!' I trust you will think it a far greater compliment to be told you are a clever boy, or that you excel in any particular science. To talk of beauty to a youth is almost an insult. I do not say it is looked upon in the same light by the other sex, yet a very handsome woman is often despised by men of sense if she values herself upon her charms. But do you think if this beautiful lady had passed you as she did me, without speaking, you would have mentioned her with such admiration? Pray what was the subject of your conversation? I hope you were very polite!"

"Oh! papa, she talked a good deal to Nelson, but it was all about me, and you, and Studeville Court, and Mrs. Studeville."

"Did the lady see me then?"

"Yes, papa."

And did she know me?" she would have said. "She did not say she did, papa." Few people had less curiosity than the Duke; yet from what his son had said, he rather wished to know who this lady was. Though an excellent master, and very much beloved by his household, few men familiarized themselves less with their servants; therefore Nelson, who was dressing his hair, did not presume to meddle in the discourse, notwithstanding he had been present during Alfred's interview with the stranger, till the Duke said, "And pray, after all, who was this handsome lady, Nelson?" "I really do not know her name, your Grace; she passed just as you were going to mount your horse, while you were saying something to the Marquis; she was in a canter, pulled up suddenly, looked behind her as if she thought you was somebody she knew, and then set off again full speed. Your Grace remarked at the time she rode well. She was dressed in a light grey habit, black hat and feathers, and followed by a groom in a dark blue

blue livery, wore a black face, and silver-laced
 that Your Grace took the contrary road,
 and the Marquis and myself nearly the one
 the lady had taken, who soon slackened her
 pace, and finding her saddle turn, alighted to
 have her girths tightened, by which time his
 Lordship and I were very near her; indeed
 his Lordship said he would go and admire
 the horse." "Yes, papa, for you said he was very pretty,
 and so he was; he had such a nice long tail,
 and let me pat him and stroke him without
 offering to bite or kick." "Those would have been very ungracious
 returns for your excess of politeness," said the
 Duke; "I perceive he was as complaisant as
 his fair rider. Pray who began the conver-
 sation, Nelson?" "His Lordship, your Grace, by praising
 the horse. The lady asked him if he would
 ride; which he would willingly have done,
 had I not been afraid to permit him. She was
 evidently a stranger to this part of the coun-
 try, as she asked me to whom this house be-
 longed,

longed, which she had been admiring. I satisfied her curiosity. She then asked me if his Lordship was not young Mr. Studeville? I told her he was the son of an Italian nobleman, upon a visit at the Court, whom she had possibly observed mounting his horse just as she passed. She remarked how well the Marquis spoke English."

"Yes, papa, and then she talked to me in Italian, which she was afraid she had forgot; but I understood her very well. She asked me how long I had been in England, and who taught me English: So I said you did, papa; and then she asked me if I liked England—where mamma was—was she at Mrs. Studeville's—and how many brothers and sisters I had? So I told her poor mamma was dead! and that we had left my little brother in Sicily. Then she asked me my name, and I told her Alfred."

"Why there seems to have been no end of her questions," said the Duke; "I hope you were more discrete than this beautiful lady seems to have been? You did not ask her

her name—nor where she lived—nor whether she had any brothers or sisters?"

"No, indeed, papa: you always tell me I should never ask questions of strangers, because it is being very impertinent; so I never do."

"You are a very good little fellow; I am very glad to find you remember what I say to you: this lady, it should appear, had no one to talk to, so amused herself with questioning you in this strange manner; she certainly is not acquainted with me by her numerous inquiries. I do not recollect ever having remarked a livery like the one you describe, Nelson; and had it been any body I had seen in Italy, you were as likely to have known either the lady or the livery as myself, therefore I can only presume it was somebody troubled with an inordinate share of curiosity, which she had not discretion enough to suppress. Which way did she go when you parted?"

"Towards Clifton, your Grace."

VOL. II.

E

"Yes,

"Yes, papa, we saw her ride up that high hill; but, before she went away, she said she supposed I walked upon the downs every day, and hoped we should meet again."

"Truly flattering," said the Duke; "I can no longer wonder at your predilection in her favour."

The sound of the second dinner bell made his Grace hurry down stairs, and for that time put an end to the conversation between him and his son. Little of any moment happened during the ensuing six days. Alfred usually took an early run upon the downs, and had twice met his favourite lady, each time differently dressed he told his father, which made him hardly know her again. The Duke rallied him, and told him he presumed she did not improve upon acquaintance, but Alfred always stood up in defence of her beauty and good-nature. The last time they met she alighted, and intreated Nelson would put the young Marquis upon her horse, which she assured him was the gentlest creature in the

the

the world, and led him about herself for upwards of a quarter of an hour to the infinite delight of Alfred. Such kind condescension, the Duke observed, would certainly have won his heart even had she been as ugly as Alfred assured him she was the reverse ; but all his Grace could learn either from him or Nelson was, that she was a lady, as her groom addressed her as such. Durdham Downs was so much the rendezvous of all the nobility and gentry resident in the vicinity, as well as of the birds of passage, who lodged either at the Hot Wells, or Clifton, that these accidental meetings between Alfred and the stranger by no means struck the Duke as extraordinary ; besides he was not unconscious, though totally free from vanity, that his title and figure might have attracted the attention of this curious female, who might wish to introduce herself to his notice through the medium of his son ; and as he did not feel himself inclined to make any new acquaintance, he never accompanied Alfred during his morning rambles, and quite deserted the

downs for a pleasant hill near Neville-House, from whence he had a very fine view of the shipping at anchor in King's Road.

CHAP. IV.

ON the seventh day after Alfred's first rencontre with the above-mentioned lady, the Duke took a longer ride than usual : he had at the commencement of his residence at the Court, intreated the old lady would make no alteration in her accustomed dinner hour upon his account, and she had complied with his request ; but this day the party were all dressed and assembled in the saloon before his return. Mrs. Studeville was afraid he had met

met with some accident, or had fallen in with some of Lord Fortrose's friends, who had persuaded him to accompany them home to dinner. Various conjectures were formed to account for his non-appearance, or at least not sending word that he meant to dine out; when the servant who always went to Bristol for letters and papers, brought them in, saying, the mail coach did not come in till some time past one.

"Oh, they an't half so well regulated as they were at first," said the draper.

"Did you see the Duke upon the downs, Samuel?" said Mrs. Studeville.

"No, Madam."

The old lady, to whom the letters were always delivered, had great pleasure in sorting them out, and reading the directions: "Four for the Duke," said she; "one from the Earl of Melton, (reading aloud) "Fortrose; this is from Mr. Neville I am certain; this from Naples—I don't know who the last comes from, it was seemingly put into the penny post at Bristol; what correspondents

can his Grace have in this part of the world?" laying the letters upon a table near her while she spoke, and presenting two to Mr. Chambers, "Those are for you, Sir." He took them from her, but under pretence of seeing how foreign letters looked, took up those addressed to the Duke before he read his own, and was apparently much struck with the one which had the Bristol penny post mark; he turned it over twice, and then laid it down again with one of those he had received, and began to read the other. Mrs. Studeville had retired to a window as soon as she had distributed the letters, not having any herself, in hopes of seeing the Duke. Mr. Chambers's proceeding had therefore passed unnoticed by any one but Miss Vernon, who sat nearly opposite, and who, from being perfectly acquainted with the sly expression of curiosity his face betrayed, immediately guessed him to be more anxious to know the contents of the letter addressed to the Duke he had chosen so narrowly to inspect, than to learn what his own correspondents had to say, as while he

he was reading his first letter, his eyes were continually turned towards that of his Grace, and as soon as he had hastily run it over, he hurried it into his pocket, took a glance at the road, and caught up another which he opened with the utmost celerity, and began to read with infinitely more attention, Miss Vernon thought, than he had bestowed upon the first, as his eyes no longer wandered, and he seemed weighing every word as he went on: at last he made a sort of sudden stop, and broke out, "If I can think, for my part, what all this here flummery means." Mrs. Studeville turned round, and he, looking at the direction, went on, "What the dickens have I done? If I ha'nt caught up, or you, Madam, gave me, in a mistake, one of the Duke's letters instead of my own?"

"For heaven's sake, Mr. Chambers, what do you mean?" said the old lady, "I am sure I gave you your letters right."

"Well, my dear Madam," said the draper, "I dare say you did; here is the other to be sure, close to me enough; God knows, if it
E 4 had

had been a bear, it would have bit me. I certainly made the mistake while my eyes were turned upon the road looking for the Duke. But what must be done with it? That is all that is to be thought of now. Upon my soul I no more meant to read the silly letter than I meant to fly."

Miss Vernon, who did not entertain the slightest doubt of the mistake being a wilful one, longed to tell him her sentiments; but as she had no positive proof to alledge against him, she thought it most prudent to remain silent.

"Upon my word, Sir," said Mrs. Studeville, "it was being excessively heedless, not to give your carelessness a harsher name; but you surely have not read it?"

"Why, Madam, I could not help it; I kept reading on, wondering all the while, and thinking every line would explain the former one, till I was quite at the bottom!"

"It is very extraordinary you were not sooner undeceived, give me leave to observe Sir," said the old lady; "I only hope it is
not

not a letter of any great consequence; though if it is a mere complimentary inquiry, that don't at all exculpate you. I would not have had such a thing happen in my house for the universe."

"Why, Madam, I certainly was to blame, and that is as much as my greatest enemies can say, let them make the most on't: I did not do it on purpose, as I said before; and at all events, it don't come from a very great man. His Grace an't above receiving letters from commoners: but here it is, Madam, as the harm is done, you may as well look it over; you will find your own name in it, I can tell you that."

The draper's looks and manner of speaking expressed more than his words. "Do you suppose, Sir," said the old lady, shoving back the proffered letter, "I would be guilty of so base an action? Give me leave to tell you, Mr. Chambers, I should scorn to read a letter not addressed to myself, by stealth as it were. I am convinced the Duke di Ferrara's

friends are of too polite a stamp to mention me, or even you, with disrespect."

"I can't pretend to say, Madam, whether the writer of this is a friend of his Grace's, though to be sure the Duke has been a damned good friend to him! However, he might flummer and palaver his benefactor over as much as he chose without taking liberties with other respectable folks: but I suppose it is all meant to curry favour with my Lord Duke—he has made him the dupe of his fine story, if you was not to be gulled by his nonsense." These hints were too plain to permit Mrs. Studeville, had she wished it, to have affected to misunderstand the draper's meaning, and he proceeded. "However I can stick his scrawl together again; I ha'nt broke the seal, and then his *benefactor*, (drawling out the word) need not know the letter has been opened."

"By no means, Sir," said Mrs. Studeville. "From what you have, much against my will, given me to understand, I presume it comes from Mr. Dixon. I know the Duke

was very bountiful to him the day he was here; and I presume he has taken this method of returning him thanks: that can't concern either you or me; what such a man says can be no scandal; but I insist upon your acknowledging the error you have been guilty of to his Grace, and, I suppose I need not add, I shall also expect you will make proper excuses, perfectly adequate for so gross an oversight."

The draper folded up the letter in a rage as Mrs. Studeville refused to read it, and flung it upon the table, saying, "Oh Lord! Madam, I will make excuses as long as my breath lasts, if you chuse. I did not want to conceal what I had done, but I am sure if you had opened one of my letters by mistake, as I did this, you would not have found yourself cut up as you are here! that is all. I have to say upon the subject: if you are satisfied, I have no right to complain."

Mrs. Studeville would have given more than she had ever bestowed in charity during her life, to have known the contents of this

E 6

letter

letter she affected to be so indifferent about. She was shocked beyond measure to think she should be held up as an object of derision, perhaps to the Duke, by this bastard brother! though she felt herself less than ever inclined to acknowledge the consanguinity. She was more than once half tempted to take up the letter, but that would be putting herself so much upon a level, and so much in the power of the draper, she rejected the idea as soon as it was formed, and during her state of perturbation the Duke came galloping towards the house. It was agreed no notice should be taken of the letters or mistake till after dinner, if his Grace made no inquiries; they were even put out of sight, as Mrs. Studeville dreaded as much as she longed for the explanation, which she hoped would prove the result of the draper's acknowledging his mistake.

The clock had struck three, and Geoffry came to inquire, the moment the Duke appeared in sight, if dinner was to be served. Mrs. Studeville said she would ring the bell, meaning

meaning to entreat his Grace would not alter his dress before he had dined. The Duke understanding the company as well as dinner was waiting his return, made his appearance in the saloon the moment he entered the house, and apologized in the politest manner for having made it so late: he had rode to the New Passage, and been induced to stop to see one of the large boats land their live cargoes, protesting he thought it might aptly be compared to Noah's ark. He was then retiring, assuring the company he would not trespass upon their patience many minutes longer. Mrs. Studeville, with a sort of cool reserve she could not divest herself of, though she tried to appear cheerful, intreated his Grace would set down as he was. The Duke instantly complied, as dinner was ready, and naturally attributed her stately air to his having kept her in suspense a few minutes beyond her time (knowing how punctual she always was), and felt hurt that a sensible woman should allow such trifles to ruffle her temper. In a few minutes they were summoned to dinner, which passed almost in total silence.

silence. His Grace, from the looks of the company, now presumed something had happened during his absence, and finding all his efforts to draw the spinster into conversation totally unavailing, rose almost as soon as the cloth was removed, meaning to retire to his dressing-room, by no means approving of the old lady's behaviour, which he attributed to pettish caprice, and thought her very absurd to display it at her own table.

Mrs. Studeville gave the draper a look to prepare his excuses, while she said, "Do me the honour to sit a few minutes longer, your Grace: the servant brought some letters from Bristol for you, which I should have given you the moment you came in, but for a most unfortunate mistake that has hurt me excessively. Niece, be so good as to fetch the Duke's letters. I must refer your Grace to Mr. Chambers for a further explanation. I was not made acquainted with the blunder he had committed till it was out of my power to prevent it."

The

The Duke, very much at a loss to comprehend her meaning, was still pleased to find her, in his opinion, absurd behaviour did not absolutely originate in caprice. Without answering her unintelligible speech, he turned to the draper, who said, "Upon my word and honour, your Grace, I am very sorry I was so careless; however I am sure you can't be so unjust as to blame Mrs. Studeville for my fault? I am sure I never did so silly an action more innocently."

The Duke interrupted him, "I must entreat you would come to the point, Sir; I am excessively sorry Mrs. Studeville should have suffered a moment's uneasiness upon my account: pray what has happened?"

"I had the misfortune to break the seal of one of your Grace's letters instead of my own," he replied.

"Bless me is that all?" said the Duke gaily, "I only hope you have left the one which occasioned this terrible mistake, for me to open in exchange? Was it an English letter?"

"Yes, your Grace."

"Why

"Why then in return for a few compliments it most probably contains, I shall learn how many bales of cloth have been disposed of since your clerk wrote last."

During the conversation Miss Vernon entered with the letters, which she presented; but her countenance unintentionally betrayed the disdain she felt for her good uncle so strongly, his Grace instantly thought he had been too ready to forgive what he had at the first moment treated so lightly. He instantly looked at the letter that had been opened, then at the draper, and read conscious guilt in the culprit's face: he therefore said, "I presume you can save me the trouble of looking it over, Mr. Chambers, for I am really not acquainted with the hand-writing? Is it a begging epistle, or do you suspect it to be a forgery? I trust in either case you will be so obliging as to put me upon my guard."

"Why as to saying I did not read it, your Grace," answered the draper, "that would be a falsity; but I declare I did not understand one word of it for a long while—till—"

"You

"You got to the conclusion," said the Duke, cutting him short; "so now pray favour me with the contents."

The old man's colour heightened; he stut-tered and stammered while the Duke unfolded the letter, looked first at the signature, then read it to himself, and when he had finished, convinced the direction (presuming the draper had recollected the hand-writing from having read Mr. Dixon's first note) had tempted him to break the seal, in hopes of making mischief, he fixed his piercing eyes upon his face, saying, "It is very extraordinary the first two words did not induce you to fold this letter up again, Sir."

"I do not know what your Grace means; I—I—" again stammered out the culprit.

"I thought my meaning was pretty obvious," said the Duke, "but to be more explicit, do your letters in general begin as this does, 'Your Grace?'"

"Certainly not, my Lord Duke, but I never look at the beginning of a letter;
the

the first two or three words are mostly compliments."

"Very possibly," said the Duke, "you may read backwards, as the Chinese write."

These remarks convinced Mrs. Studeville however lightly he treated the matter at first, the Duke now found himself seriously offended; and convinced nothing but the most unpardonable curiosity could have induced the draper to read the letter through, admitting he had opened it from inadvertency, she said, "I assure your Grace, I never was more hurt than when I learned what Mr. Chambers had done; however I can assure you he alone is acquainted with the contents: he merely, and that unasked, told me my name was mentioned in it."

Curiosity and a sort of half pique quite got the better of the old lady's discretion. The Duke saw she was vexed and excessively anxious to know more; he therefore instantly guessed what kind hints the draper had given her; and though he thought she deserved to be punished for listening to what such a low malicious

malicious being could say, yet as he had read the letter, he thought it would be very absurd not to gratify her curiosity with a sight of it, as he found every means had been taken to stimulate the poor lady's greatest failing. She evidently neither wished to affront him herself, nor would she suffer any one to do it with impunity; and as she no doubt knew from whom the letter came, her pettishness was almost inexcusable; yet knowing she would not derive much pleasure from the gratification of her curiosity, he was rather hurt to be thus in a manner forced to wound her feelings, particularly as he foresaw the letter would lead to other explanations he would much rather have avoided entering into; however, considering suspense to be one of the most painful sensations, he answered the old lady by presenting her with the letter, only saying, "You cannot suppose, my dear Madam, I wish to lay myself under any obligations to Mr. Chambers's discretion. I certainly did not mean to have made the effusions of gratitude the writer of this letter has suffered

ferred to flow from his pen, public: you cannot suppose me capable of such despicable vanity; and I trust you will be more ready to forgive a few harsh expressions, the offspring of a wounded mind, than that curious gentleman seems to have been."

Mrs. Studeville was almost as much confused as the old draper; she thought like him, knowing herself to be really guilty at least of curiosity, the Duke had penetrated her wishes, therefore declined the offer. "Your Grace must excuse me; what you have said, convinces me it was not intended for my refusal; I can't think of availing myself of your condescension."

This was carrying the farce of indifference too far, the Duke thought, and by no means a suitable return for his polite offer; had she frankly accepted it, acknowledged herself obliged to him, and even criticised the writer, he would have believed she acted naturally and properly; but this formal affectation half offended him, his pride was awakened, but a moment's reflection made him find an
excuse

excuse for the old lady's absurd refusal, and induced him to present the letter with a good-humoured smile to Miss Vernon, "Will you, my fair coz, (his usual address to that young lady,) "do me the favour to read this unfortunate epistle? Mrs. Studeville may not have the same objection to hearing that she has to reading it herself."

Miss Vernon instantly took the letter, and, to prevent the starting of any objections, began to read—

"Your Grace,

"How inadequate is the English, or indeed any language, to express the overflowings of a heart replete with the most unbounded gratitude, and sincerest admiration! but I dare not give way to the feelings your kind, soothing, benevolent letter excited in my bosom, conscious you hardly wish your left hand to know what your right bestows. Yet, my noble, my much-revered benefactor, to find myself raised almost in a minute, after so severe a disappointment, from absolute want

to a state of affluence, seems almost incomprehensible even to myself. Two hundred pounds a year at my time of life is a large fortune!"

Miss Vernon, whose own generous heart taught her to appreciate so noble a deed, mentally said, "Heaven bless thy noble benefactor!" And surely, as Sterne expresses himself, "The recording angel caught the sound, and carried it up to heaven." She dared not express her feelings openly, but finding her eyes glisten, made a sort of pause, and affected to sneeze. Mrs. Studeville, completely roused from her late disagreeable reflections, seemed as much hurt as surprised: this the draper observed, and resolved to lead her thoughts to his own advantage. The Duke had drawn his chair towards one of the windows, and was reading another letter, which engaged his attention much more than the one Miss Vernon was perusing. She was going to proceed, when old Chambers said—

"There

"There, Madam, I don't wonder, for my own part, the Duke was desirous so generous an action should be made public, and I dare say his Grace has done it to prevent the old chap from troubling you again, Madam! But I can tell him, much as he is my superior, he an't up to half the rigs that are practised in old England! Faith, two hun 'red a year to a man who, I will be sworn, never saw so much at any one time, much more called such a sum his own, may seem a large fortune."

"Egad," said Robert, "I wish I could meet with such a friend. I warrant me I could invent as good a story; nay, without taking that trouble, I could have bought as good a one in London streets for a halfpenny! But I suppose there are none of these kind of beggars in Italy?"

As no one answered these two wise men, silence again ensued, and Miss Vernon proceeded—

"But not contented with having thus munificently provided for my future maintenance,

nance, you request me to favour you with a direction, because, to use your own expressions, "you shall ever feel interested in my concerns." What but my prayers have I to offer in return for such unmerited proofs of condescension? When I am once more settled, your Grace may depend upon hearing from me; for the present a letter addressed to me at the ——— Coffee-house, St. James's-Street, will be sure to reach me. But now permit me to notice the draft accompanying the annuity deed, so kindly considerate! but I must not expatiate upon the subject; I only hope it will one day be in my power to convince you I can also feel for the poor and needy, and while I have the means, surely I shall never want the will to relieve their necessities. My application to Mrs. Studeville was, as I told that lady, my last resource—its failure did not surprise me—her general character had taught me to expect it; surely she does not recollect, that "Where much is given, much is required." I have long since ceased to wonder at any thing, or I should have

have been surprised that the seven remaining descendants of Sir Yelverton Studeville could not raise a guinea amongst them ! Your Grace's valet bestowed one upon me, and told me his master was every thing I have found him to be. However, since my visit to Mrs. Studeville introduced me to your Grace's notice, I shall for ever bless the hour I entered her inhospitable doors. But I forget I am trespassing upon your Grace's time, therefore beg leave to subscribe myself,

" Your &c. &c."

For a minute or more after Miss Vernon ceased reading, no one spoke, each wishing the other to begin ; but the Duke's silence embarrassed them all : he was still reading his letter, which was from the Earl of Melton, and a much longer one than he in general wrote to the Court ; — he concluded it nearly at the same time Miss Vernon finished Mr. Dixon's, which she had folded, and now presented to him in silence ; he bowed as he put it in his pocket, and opened one of his other letters. Mrs. Studeville fully expected he

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would have endeavoured once more to excuse Mr. Dixon, whom she began to dislike most cordially, and was determined at once to discover, if possible, the Duke's reason for this act of prodigality, for what else could bestowing such a sum upon an impostor be deemed by rational people? therefore as soon as his Grace had concluded his second letter, which was very short, she said, "Upon my word your Grace has been generous almost beyond credibility, when one reflects such a handsome income has been settled upon a total stranger! But gentlemen of your age are apt, sometimes, to allow liberality to degenerate into imprudence. I mean no reflection I can assure your Grace; I only hope your fortune keeps pace with your generosity for your children's sakes. But I presume you credit the scandalous story Mr. Dixon had the assurance to relate the day he was here: however, should he repeat it in my neighbourhood, I shall be under the disagreeable necessity of applying to the law for redress; for

for Sir Yelverton de Studeville's character shall not be vilified with impunity!"

The Duke, confident he had it in his power effectually to silence the old lady, was more diverted than offended by her warmth. He wished to hear the draper's sentiments before he replied, convinced now his aim was, if possible, to foment a quarrel between him and Mrs. Studeville, though, from not entertaining the same expectations the old man did, his Grace did not comprehend what end such a scheme was to answer, allowing him to bring it to bear. The whole Chambers party seemed to gain courage from what Mrs. Studeville had said: the draper thought now or never was the moment, yet determined to go gently to work; so thus began—

"I only hope his Grace's bounty won't put any bad designs into this here old fellow's noddle. For my part, though I am nobody, but, for my part, simple as I am, I should as soon have thought of providing for one of the convicts on board the hulks at Woolwich! The respect I shall ever feel for you,

Madam, would have prevented me from setting such a base-born low fellow above himself, as a body may say."

The draper stopped, giving Robert and James a look to support him: both disapproved what his Grace had done, though they agreed it might be with the best intentions in the world, and without foreseeing evil consequences were likely to arise from such an action: and James went so far as to say, addressing himself to the Duke, "I dare say your Grace would not approve of any of the Lazzeroni of Naples calling themselves your brother; and Mr. Dixon is, in my opinion, endeavouring to establish his claim to such a relationship to Mrs. Studeville."

The Duke, who very justly deemed the whole party beneath his notice, did not think Mr. Vernon at all more deserving an answer than the draper or his son, therefore without even looking at him, turned to Mrs. Studeville—"I am very sorry, Madam, what I have done does not meet your approbation; but give me leave to assure you I could have
made

made the hundreds I have bestowed upon Mr. Dixon thousands without affecting my children's interest! I did not intend to become this unfortunate man's champion, but unavoidably, in my own defence, am obliged to assert he is neither an impostor nor a vagabond; in short, I know him to be the very person he gave himself out to be—the son of my great uncle, neither whose character nor honour can suffer from such an acknowledgment, and as such, I thought myself in some measure, considering my ability, bound to place him above want.”

Mrs. Studeville was thunderstruck to think even this great man dared thus openly assert her brother's claims, and in the same breath attempt to vindicate Sir Yelverton! There was neither virtue nor morality in Italy, she was convinced; and his Grace must be utterly devoid of either! This she now seriously determined to let him know, but wished to do it in the politest terms, as she still felt the greatest respect for his rank and fortune (the latter she presumed was immense),

menſe), though ſhe heartily deſpiſed his looſe principles ;—ſhe endeavoured to reſtrain her paſſion till ſhe could addreſs the Duke with ſome degree of calmneſs. Miſs Vernon, perfectly acquainted with her aunt's temper, ſaw the impending ſtorm with the utmoſt regret :—independent of every other conſideration, it would afford the draper ſuch a triumph, who ſeemed to exult already in the ſucceſs of his machinations, and now ſaid, “I am ſure your Grace is deſerving of a large fortune with ſuch noble ſentiments! You have no need to ſtudy to pleaſe any body but yourſelf, and if you chuſe to make ducks and drakes of your money, what can it be to me, or any body elſe?”

“You are very right, Sir,” ſaid the Duke, “therefore let me adviſe you to keep any farther illiberal remarks you may wiſh to make upon my actions to yourſelf, as I don't find myſelf inclined to paſs them over in ſilence.”

The draper, though burſting with rage, was inſtantly awed into obedience. Mrs.

Studeville

Studeville was now going to request the Duke would make good what he had advanced respecting Mr. Dixon; she foresaw what was likely to be the issue of the debate, yet was determined to stand up in Sir Yelverton's defence, even at the risk of offending both the Duke and the Earl, as she had one very consoling reflection to support her, should they both desert her—she was not in want of any thing they had to bestow:—this encouraged her, and she was coughing by way of clearing her voice, when the Duke, having taken two letters from his pocket-book, presented them to Miss Vernon, requesting her to take the trouble once more to read those for the information of Mrs. Studeville—

“After what I have asserted respecting Mr. Dixon, she ought to know upon what grounds I have formed the opinion I maintained.”

Then applying to the old lady, he went on:

“I am convinced, my dear Madam, if you had not suffered yourself to have been misled by insinuations I should have supposed you would have despised as much as I do, you

would have acted (upon the same conviction) exactly as I have done. Of the liberality of your disposition I have had ample proofs, for, believe me, what I allude to excited not only my admiration, but impressed me with the deepest sense of gratitude; I am, therefore, the more astonished to find you condemn me for following the example you so nobly set me. Nature taught me to revere the virtue it has ever been my ambition to emulate!"

This animated speech, delivered with the utmost energy, dispelled, as if by magic, every cloud upon Mrs. Studeville's brow; she was tempted to return her thanks to heaven aloud for not having undertaken to correct this truly noble cousin! she was so humbled in one sense, and so gratified in another, as hardly to know which sentiment predominated. To find the trifle she had bestowed upon Mr. St. Aubyns had made such a strong impression upon the Duke's mind was particularly flattering at such a moment, though she was afraid, nay was certain, she had lowered herself very much in his opinion. "He inherits

all

all his father's virtues," she thought, and sighed without being aware of it. Convinced he had ample proof of the truth of what he had advanced, she would at that moment have taken her unfortunate brother by the hand, and publicly have acknowledged him as such, to have been reinstated in the Duke's good graces. Meanwhile a visible consternation seemed to reign amongst the Chambers family; they saw themselves upon the point of having all the sanguine hopes they had formed overthrown, most probably, for ever. The draper recollected the recent caution he had received, or he would certainly have said something; however, as a sort of profound silence prevailed, Miss Vernon began to read the letters the Duke had put into her hands, for the benefit of the company: they were both very short. The first was from Mess. C——'s, the Bankers, in answer to various inquiries the Duke had made concerning the thousand pounds draft mentioned in the letter Mr. Dixon had sent by the draper to Mrs. Studeville. The date his Grace had men-

tioned, and that in their books tallied exactly, they wrote word, and the draft alluded to had been received and indorsed by John Studeville Dixon, whose hand-writing perfectly agreed with the specimen his Grace had inclosed. The other letter was from the War Office, and merely contained the name, age, time of entering, and quitting the service, and various other official details concerning Captain John Studeville Dixon; such as where the regiment was at the time he disposed of his commission, who became the purchaser, and confirmed that corps having been ordered to Quebec immediately after the transaction. Miss Vernon returned the letters to his Grace, while she cast a look of triumph around her.

The draper was furious to find all his machinations had terminated in establishing the *claims* he had so strenuously endeavoured from the first moment to invalidate, cursed his own idle curiosity, which had brought forward a debate, and had ended in so truly mortifying a manner for him and his dear Robert;

who, with his adherent James, now hung down their heads, as if they had been detected in the actual commission of some petty larceny!

The Duke replaced his letters, and, really hurt that the old lady had in a manner forced him to wound her feelings, was going to speak, when she, after another sigh, and without daring to raise her eyes, said, "I find I have acted very wrong; I am really ashamed when I come to reflect; to your Grace, in particular, I shall never be able to excuse myself: I certainly allowed myself, almost wilfully, to be misled. Had I asked your advice, and followed it, I should have saved some bitter reproaches! I have nothing to plead in my defence; I can only now say, I will endeavour to imitate your Grace's munificence:—still it may be wrong, yet I own I should rather wish Mr. Dixon's near affinity to me were not made absolutely public."

At that moment the old lady ventured to look at the Duke, and met his eyes; she instantly lowered her own, while his Grace

replied, "I can't conceive you need entertain such fears, Ma'am, for I should not suppose Mr. Dixon has such an intention ; his manners and conversation bespeak him much above the ordinary class, and as for the silly idea of his attempting legally to prove his consanguinity, it is too absurd to require refutation. He is now, I should presume, upon his road to London ; at my request he staid at Bristol till I received those letters Miss Vernon has just been reading. What followed was a mere matter of course, and but for Mr. Chambers's mistake I should certainly not have made so natural an action public."

The old lady wished to make a vast many more excuses, but the Duke cut them very short in the most delicate manner, and tried to put her in a better humour with herself ; and as she found he was so ready to forgive the liberties she had taken, she entered into a desultory conversation with him respecting Mr. Dixon, whom she no longer scrupled to call brother. His Grace spoke of him in the highest terms, acknowledged that his venerable

nerable appearance prepossessed him in his favour the moment he saw him, and that a short conversation he had with him afterwards convinced him his countenance was the real index of his mind.

The draper, who could no longer contain himself, determined, at every risk, to speak his sentiments. Without permitting the Duke to finish his panegyric, he exclaimed, "Why this here chap may be a very good sort of a man now to be sure, but nobody shall prevent me from thinking he has been a damned extravagant fellow; and I say he an't worth any body's notice, for if he don't sell his annuity for as much as it will fetch before a week is at an end, why my name an't Robert Chambers, that's all."

The Duke, who had already had some difficulty to keep his temper with this presumptuous fellow, and wholly unaccustomed to be treated with such gross familiarity till he became an inhabitant of Mrs. Studeville's house, looked at the draper for some seconds with the utmost contempt, then said, "You seem

seem to be troubled with a short memory, Sir!"

The draper lost all his assurance, and stammered out, "I am sure I did not mean to offend your Grace, I—I—"

A look from the old lady completely stopped his mouth; and, turning to the Duke, she renewed the conversation the draper had broken in upon, by saying "I am so perfectly convinced Mr. Dixon is truly deserving, I must entreat your Grace would suffer me to take the generous engagement you have entered into upon myself; it shall equally stand in your name."

The Duke smiled—"You are certainly in jest, my dear Madam?"

"I beg your Grace will pardon me," said the old lady, after a moment's reflection, convinced a serious proposal of that nature ought not to have been made publicly, "but I must request, if I am not too encroaching, that, should you write to Mr. Dixon during your stay at the Court, you would endeavour to excuse both my want of generosity and feeling

feeling towards him, and inclose a small earnest of my future bounty. I am truly sorry for the treatment he met with, but notwithstanding his foresight, had he immediately referred me to Messieurs C——, or any other people of respectability, I should have acted very differently."

The Duke affected to give into her way of thinking, and was not sorry the appearance of Alfred, who had not seen his father since his return from his ride, not having been sent for as usual, put a stop to the conversation. Mrs. Studeville was shocked to think her silly pet had made her commit such a solecism in good manners. In a short time the Duke went to dress; Alfred accompanied him; and the old lady, not disposed to listen to any thing farther the draper had to say about Mr. Dixon, retired with Grace to her dressing-room.

The moment her back was turned, Mr. Chambers gave a loose to his rage. "The Duke was a damned busy meddling puppy; and as for the old cat, she was a downright weathercock;

weathercock; could blow hot and cold with the same breath, and to look big in the eyes of this great man, she did not care what she flung away upon bastard brothers! But he saw through the Duke's views plain enough; let him be rich or poor, they should all pay for his journey to England, and free him home again, he foresaw; that if he had but been drowned when he tried to save his old scrubby grandfather's life, it might have proved fortunate for them all."

Thus he ran on till the Duke and Mrs. Studeville joined them at tea; from that time till supper the old lady played at piquet with his Grace, and left the rest of the party to amuse themselves as they chose, which the draper did not fail to renumerate in his catalogue of grievances, and vowed vengeance against the Duke, whom he now looked upon as one of his greatest enemies.

CHAP.

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CHAP. V.

NEXT morning Nelson, when he entered his master's room, delivered a message from Mrs. Studeville, to entreat his Grace and the Marquis would honour her with their company at breakfast in her dressing-room, as she was not very well. The Duke, of course, made no objection, and soon joined her.

The real truth was, the old lady wished now to keep him as much as possible out of the company of the Chambers family. Miss Vernon attended to do the laborious part of the business, that it might not be said below she

she wished for a tête-à-tête with this fine young fellow !

As soon as the first compliments and mutual inquiries were over, the Duke took a letter out of his pocket, which he presented to Mrs. Studeville, intreating she would peruse it at leisure, and inform him if he had expressed himself as she wished to Mr. Dixon.

"Bless me, your Grace ! what been writing already this morning ? You are truly an early riser."

"I do not deserve your compliment, Ma'am," said the Duke ; "I wrote it before I went to bed, in imitation of Plato, who always composed his works by the midnight lamp."

"Your Grace's greatest study," said the old lady, "seems to be how most to oblige those whom you honour with your friendship. Be so good, niece, as to read the Duke's letter while the tea cools."

Miss Vernon did as she desired. It began with thanks for the direction Mr. Dixon had sent him; his Grace next reverted to the mistake

take that had discovered what had passed between them to Mrs. Studeville and the party assembled at the Court; the old lady's want of generosity, and in some respects compassion, was excused in the most delicate manner, and attributed to her agitation at the moment he made himself known to her, to her sudden surprise, and want of time for reflection; and the letter concluded by intreating he would accept the inclosed sum as an earnest of Mrs. Studeville's future bounty. The old lady, ever eager when neither pride, passion, nor interest, blinded her, to compliment her favourite cousin, the moment Miss Vernon ceased, said—

“Your Grace's ideas are as refined as your language, and you seem to possess in an eminent degree the art of conferring favours, without humbling the person upon whom you bestow them.”

The Duke, by no means partial to the incessant doses of adulation she for ever assailed him with, merely smiled, but took no other notice of her eulogium.

When

When breakfast was over, she presented him with two fifty pounds notes, which she intreated him to inclose, and, if she was not too troublesome, to add, by way of post-script, Mr. Dixon might depend upon the same sum annually during his life ! The Duke complied with her desire, leaving out the concluding words, not wishing to remind the good old man of his latter end ; and Miss Vernon took charge of the letter till the servant went to Bristol.

His Grace then told the old lady, Lord Fortrose and Mr. Neville were to return to Neville-House the next day, which was giving her to understand he meant to leave the Court, though he allowed her time to digest his first piece of information before he disclosed the second, perceiving the effect sudden surprises had upon her nerves. She actually turned pale while she replied—

“I hope his Lordship’s return won’t deprive me of your Grace’s company an hour sooner than you at first intended.”

“My

"My time has already more than expired, my dear Madam : the Viscount intreats I will give him the meeting at Neville-House, which he expects to reach by dinner to-morrow, and as I know both he and Mr. Neville shortened their stay in Devonshire upon my account, the least I can do is to comply with their polite intreaty, though I can assure you I shall take my leave of Studeville-Court with real reluctance."

The old lady's perturbation increased: though she had not a doubt but Lord Fortrose and his son were coming home, as the Duke had acquainted her, still she was afraid he had not absolutely forgiven what had passed the day before ; so said, with a serious face, "I shall really presume your Grace to be offended with either me, or my guests, if you leave me so soon ; and in either case, I shall never forgive myself. Indeed I have frequently severely repented having introduced the Duke di Ferrara to the low set now in my house."

"You

“You must permit me to tell you, my dear Madam,” said the Duke, “you have put a very unfair construction upon my wish to treat Lord Fortrose with that politeness so much his due. You must be conscious you have never offended me, and you cannot suppose me weak enough to brood over a few impertinent remarks that slightly provoked me at the moment they were uttered, and which I have blamed myself very severely for noticing even at the time; but I cannot boast of any great command over my passions, and what ought only to excite contempt in the bosom of a sensible man, is very apt to make the wisest of us angry; and I know I am often too warm.”

“Not at all, your Grace; a nobleman ought to support his dignity, and act, upon all occasions, with becoming spirit. Had I followed the dictates of my inclination yesterday, Mr. Chambers should not have slept another night under my roof; but I should most likely have been blamed by the world in general, as I could not with any propriety
have

have published my reasons for treating him as he deserved, and people would have said, I turned him out because he was beneath me, and that I only admitted him to gratify my pride. I wish, as much as lies in my power, to avoid censure ; and the world gets more and more censorious every day. My poor sister's imprudent step has given the vulgar wretches (for I positively hardly know which is the most disagreeable of the four) a sort of claim to my favour I cannot absolutely disallow. Indeed I thought the old man a very different character to what he now appears to be ; and when he wrote me word his son was going to be married, he seemed so eager to introduce his poor yea and nay daughter-in-law to my notice, I was weak enough to invite him to spend a fortnight or three weeks at the Court : when they mean to return to town I cannot say ; I was in hopes I should have got rid of them before this time. I protest, if your Grace does not favour me with a few days longer, I shall attribute your departure in a great measure to their being

being here. I am determined to rid my house of them if I cannot prevail upon you to oblige me, as I shall not scruple telling them they have deprived me of your company."

The Duke laughed at the solemn assurance, and foreseeing she would be as good as her word, promised he would intreat Lord Fortrose to permit him to finish the week at the Court, though she must allow him to dine and spend the following day at Neville House. Mrs. Studeville, once more in high good-humour, could make no objection to so reasonable a proposal, and thus it was settled.

When Miss Vernon joined the family party, wishing to hear their remarks, she told them Mrs. Studeville had with difficulty prevailed upon the Duke to extend his stay at the Court.

"Oh! what she shammed sickness to obtain her ends!" said the draper; "Aye, aye, take my word for it, Grace, he wished for nothing better than to be pressed. I can see as far into a mill-stone as them that pecks it. He has found out the old cat's weak side; she will soon be at his beck and call, nay she is already

already! You see he takes upon himself to give laws to us all, and can make her say and unsay the same things ten times in the course of the day. He had some damned deep meaning for settling two hundred a year upon her bastard brother; he thinks to have it again in meal or in malt; however, I may be too many for him at last, and I am determined we will see him out if he stays till doomsday."

Having heard this heroic resolution, Miss Vernon left him to plan some new scheme to injure Mrs. Studeville and this detested Duke, who, Mr. Chambers did not scruple to tell his family, would soon persuade the old cat, "the moon was made of a green-cheese edged round with butter-milk!"

CHAP. VI.

THE following day the Duke and Alfred spent at Neville-House; his Grace amused the Viscount and his son with various animadversions upon the old lady's guests, but did not mention Mr. Dixon for obvious reasons; entreated the Viscount would permit him to remain at the Court till the ensuing Saturday, if he felt any pity for the poor draper, to whose vulgarity the old lady meant to place his departure;—though he acknowledged he was rather tired of the spinster's society, yet he could not bear the thought of giving

giving her an opportunity of wreaking her threatened vengeance upon the devoted victims. The Viscount declared he thought Mrs. Studeville would be obliged to his Grace for affording her so excellent a pretence to get rid of her present guests, though he could not object to his prolonging his visit four days, since he was actuated by charitable motives, but hoped he would not permit the spinster to encroach any farther upon his good-nature. Neville protested he would endeavour to make her repent having taken such an unfair advantage of his Grace's peaceable disposition, by spending the greatest part of his time at the Court, whether she invited him or not, while the Duke continued her inmate. His Grace encouraged him to persevere in this resolution.

The next morning, therefore, by half past eleven, he was announced, and hardly allowed himself time to pay his compliments to the old lady and Miss Vernon, before he asked the Duke if he was not inclined for a ride. His question was seconded by so significant a look,

a look, his Grace presumed he had something of importance to communicate, and immediately ordered his horses; in less than a quarter of an hour they left the house together. They were no sooner upon the downs, than the Duke said, "Now, pray what made you in such haste to leave the Court, Neville?" I should have thought, after so long an absence, you would have had a thousand things to say to my fair cousin! I am afraid some more fortunate Devonshire belle has robbed her of your heart."

"No, positively, your Grace; I admire your fair cousin as much as ever I did; but *entre nous*, I never ran so great a risk of increasing the votaries of the blind deity as within this last half hour, and but for a discovery I made almost at the moment I received my *scratch*, I bade very fair to sigh out the remains of my days the victim of a hopeless passion."

"Why this is *du grand tragique*," said the Duke: "flames, darts, and victims! I begin to fear you have not escaped so well as you wish

wish to make me believe. I never talked nonsense more seriously myself when I was as romantic a lover as you ever will be. Yonder comes Alfred; you never asked after him, poor fellow; this divinity has certainly bereft you of your sober senses."

"I spoke to the dear boy before I reached the Court. I positively found the young rogue in company with an angel! There really is nothing hyperbolical in the expression."

"I am only sorry your comparison has not novelty to recommend it," said the Duke; "do try and get out of the common lover's jargon—be a little less sublime; you began quite *il Penseroso*."

Alfred just then passed them, and the Duke bid him hurry home, as Mrs. Studeville was waiting for him.

"Well, but *badinage apart*, your Grace," said Neville, "have you ever seen this beautiful woman? Is she any acquaintance of your's? The Marquis and she seemed upon the most familiar terms."

"Upon my honour I have never been so fortunate: though, I must own, Alfred is almost as much in love with this fair unknown as you seem to be, but he is not such an enthusiast in her cause; nay, her horse comes in for a share of his admiration."

"But who is she, Duke? and how came they acquainted?"

"By mere chance, as you might have concluded, if all your faculties had not been absorbed in admiration. They met upon the downs about ten days ago, and have since always chatted with each other: the lady has even been complaisant enough to alight, and suffer him to ride once or twice upon her horse, and is, by his account, as good natured as his aunt Leontini, who permits him to do just as he pleases; but as for who she is I cannot pretend to say—I only understand she bears the title of my lady; and from what has passed between her and Alfred, I think, (Neville excuse my frankness), she is a weak, curious, prating woman of quality!"

"Your

"Your Grace has quite damped the ardour of my passion. What a cruel judgment you seem to have formed of my poor goddess. But positively, setting romance aside, I never saw a woman so exactly answer Milton's beautiful description of our first mother! Every variation of her countenance displayed a fresh attraction! Now only form an idea of a seraph's head placed upon one of the most elegant figures Nature ever yet modelled, and conceive a countenance beaming with intelligence, tinged with a soft melancholy, while she gazed upon your lovely boy, which made it doubly interesting."

"Bravo! bravo!" said the Duke; "Alfred merely gave me a sketch in water colours, I find; but why not say at once she was the Venus de Medicis stepped into life? I must devise some means to see this golden-haired divinity. I am astonished, as you stopped to speak to Alfred, you did not endeavour to draw her into conversation."

"I was absolutely too much struck with her at the moment to make the attempt. I

looked at her so long, and so earnestly, I am sure she thought me rude, for she instantly turned her head, and walked away."

"I think that was very fortunate, all things considered; a second glance might have made your heart irretrievably her own."

"I did get a second glance, Duke, and made a discovery I should not otherwise have done, for if she had not turned from me, I should certainly not have lowered my eyes; as she was walking away, they rested upon her left hand, in which she held her whip, and not having her glove on, a little magic gold circle upon the fourth finger made my heart sink into its former place again, and I am now as much Miss Vernon's admirer as before this rencontre."

"How much she ought to be obliged to you!" observed the Duke; "however, my amiable cousin has raised herself so much in my esteem during my residence at the Court, I feel half inclined to revenge the affront offered to her charms, by attempting to rival you in the unknown lady's good graces; for
though

though she be a married woman, as an Italian, she may permit me to assume the title of her Cicerleo. I have some notion she wishes to get introduced at the Court, from various questions she has asked Nelson; and as she is full as curious, by Alfred's account, as cousin Rachel, and possesses a title, I think she will be an excellent companion for the old lady: but you have not told me her age."

"I should suppose her to be between three and four and twenty, and rather think she has lost a son much about the age of your's, as her fine blue eyes expressed such an engaging melancholy softness while she listened to his artless prattle, before I disturbed their discourse. She positively more than once made me break the tenth commandment! but when she smiled and gave him a parting kiss, zounds! I only wonder I did not catch her in my arms, or pour out my whole soul at her feet."

"What, got again into the heroics, man?" said the Duke.

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"Your

"Your Grace is an absolute stoic!" continued Neville.

"Why now do you suppose the mere description of the finest woman in Christendom would make me rant as you have done? Yet you are not half so romantic as I have been in my time: however, I am really curious to see this unknown fair-one; the melancholy you remarked in her countenance is very inconsistent with the absurd questions she has put to Alfred. She may, as you observe, have lost a son, and I may have formed a very erroneous judgment: I only hope I shall stand the shock of her blue eyes better than you seem to have done; but if you will ride over rather early to-morrow morning, and put your horse up, we will accompany Alfred upon the downs, and he shall introduce us to this earth-treading star."

Their discourse now took a more serious turn. Neville wished very much to know the Duke's real opinion of Miss Vernon, whom they had agreed not to mention in Lord Portrose's presence, as Neville was not absolutely

solutely certain whether his Lordship would approve of her for a daughter-in-law; she was only the daughter of a clergyman, and her fortune, though handsome, might not be deemed a sufficient equivalent for her want of birth.

The Duke perfectly understood his young friend's hints, and agreed the Viscount might wish him to look higher for a wife: he then gave him his real opinion of Miss Vernon, which was by no means calculated to lessen the esteem Neville already felt for her; though he acknowledged, "she had not taken his heart by storm, as the fair stranger had been near doing."

The Duke laughed at the enthusiasm he displayed in the cause of beauty, and finding it grew late, they returned to the Court.

Mr. Neville was entreated by the lady of the mansion to stay dinner, and accepted the invitation. The draper disliked Neville without hardly knowing why: he was a Lord's son, that was one reason, for he had an aversion to titles; and he was the Duke

di Ferrara's friend, which was another :—he therefore cut him up pretty freely to his family after he had taken his leave, and the Duke and Mrs. Studeville had retired for the night: he at last reluctantly followed their example, as he was not fond of going to bed before twelve, and liked to smoke a pipe after supper, a luxury he never could indulge in at Studeville Court. The Duke was still more accustomed to late hours than he was, therefore generally read or wrote an hour or two in his dressing-room after he had dismissed his valet, and this evening he had recourse to a book he had taken out of the library the preceding day; but found he wandered from the subject, not that the stranger came across him, but as he felt himself particularly interested in the fate of Neville and Miss Vernon, and had every reason to believe they would make each other happy, he thought he could not do either a more essential service than by promoting an union between them. There was every reason to suppose some part of Mrs. Studeville's

immense property would devolve to her favourite niece at her death, admitting she was not inclined to bestow any thing upon her during her life-time; and if her birth was not illustrious, her father had been an honour to his profession, therefore a connexion with his daughter could not reflect disgrace upon any family:—besides, Lord Fortose was far superior to the narrow prejudices Mrs. Studeville was infected with; and Miss Vernon was among his favourites: he determined seriously to advise Neville to open his sentiments to the Viscount, but then thought he should like to sound Mrs. Studeville upon the subject first. Having come to this resolution, he retired to bed.

Next morning, almost immediately after breakfast, the old lady, ever anxious to take him out of the draper's company, said she wanted to consult him upon some improvements she intended to make in the course of the autumn, and led him into the library for that purpose, because from the windows he would be able to judge of the effect her proposed alterations would have: the Chambers

bers family dared not follow them, and Miss Vernon had withdrawn to write letters.

"Improvements indeed!" said the draper, as soon as they were gone, "the best thing the proud old cat could order would be her coffin! At her time of life, with such a church-yard cough, to think of alterations! She had better set about making her will; it would be more to the purpose!"

Various other witty remarks were made by the rest of the family, and they all agreed to take a walk to Bristol, to see if they had any letters, as since Mr. Chambers's mistake, if Mrs. Studeville was not returned from her airing when the servant came home with the letters, Geoffry took charge of them, by her orders, and those for the Duke were immediately given to his valet, the others were, as usual, delivered to Mrs. Studeville, who never distributed them till she came down to dinner. This new arrangement provoked the draper excessively, as he never had an opportunity of answering a letter by return of post, which he had frequently done before; and

he was the more mortified as he dared not complain, knowing too well what would be said. Meanwhile the Duke was listening with a patience that might almost be deemed heroic, to Mrs. Studeville, who had opened the window, and was expatiating very learnedly upon *vistas*, and concluded by saying, her niece had infinite taste.

The Duke bestowed some very just encomiums upon Miss Vernon, and then said, "I am almost surprised, my dear Madam, none of the neighbouring gentlemen have attempted to rob you of your agreeable companion."

"There are few deserving of her, in my opinion, your Grace, else, believe me, much as I should feel the loss of her society, I should be happy to see her united to some amiable man capable of discerning and rewarding her merits!—She has already refused two offers by my advice!"

"She seems to pay infinite deference to your judgment, Madam. What think you of my friend Neville?—though, believe me,

I am

I am not authorised to make proposals in his name; I merely asked the question, to discover if he stands as high in your estimation as he does in mine."

The old lady drew herself up while she said a thousand handsome things of Mr. Neville, but had not vanity enough to suppose she should ever call him nephew:—"Though I must say," she went on, "I should like to see my niece a Viscountess!"

This was looking rather too far into futurity, the Duke thought; and she proceeded. "And to bring about so desirable an event, I would add something very handsome to her fortune on her wedding-day; it now nearly amounts to thirty thousand pounds; she is at little or no expence in my house, and I would absolutely make it fifty thousand pounds down, besides what I mean to leave her at my death."

The Duke was rejoiced to find the old lady possessed such generous sentiments, and thought this promise in a great measure atoned for her behaviour to Mr. Dixon. He
applauded

applauded her intentions, and protested he thought his young friend could not make a more eligible connexion.

The appearance of Miss Vernon, who came to let the Duke know Mr. Neville was in the saloon, interrupted the conversation. Mrs. Studeville accompanied the Duke to his friend, whom she received with even marked politeness, and construed the mere *compliments d'usage* he paid Miss Vernon into proofs of his tender attachment; she was therefore determined, even if she doubled the sum she mentioned to the Duke, to remove any objections Lord Fortrose might make, she would secure a title in expectation for her niece, who would always be her neighbour in the country; and such an alliance would considerably add to her own consequence in the eyes of the surrounding gentry;—according to the common course of nature Lord Fortrose could not live many years. She was ten years his senior, but this she either forgot, or purposely overlooked. She therefore, in the warmth of her zeal to promote

promote this match, gave Mr. Neville a general invitation to her house, paid him many compliments upon the improvement he had derived from his travels, and as soon as the Duke, Alfred, and he sat out upon their projected walk, asked her niece what she thought of the Duke's young friend? Miss Vernon spoke her real sentiments of him, which were very favourable, and observed the intimacy that subsisted between his Grace and him was a strong proof he possessed many amiable qualities. The old lady was highly pleased, said much in praise of the Duke, to whom, since she had discovered his bounty towards her brother, she had determined to make some present worthy his acceptance, and had several times consulted her niece upon the occasion; but they could neither of them think of any thing suitable for a man of his rank. Miss Vernon mentioned various ornaments in jewellery she had seen, and understood men of fashion wore.—The Duke never displayed any: a ring containing a plait of hair, (they presumed to have been his late wife's)

set

set round with diamonds, was the only one he wore. Mrs. Studeville therefore concluded he thought many of the articles Miss Vernon had enumerated too effeminate for a man. The consultation was now renewed, till they separated to prepare for their accustomed airing.

CHAP. VII.

THE Duke, Alfred, and Neville sallied out, as has been observed: his Grace took no notice of what had passed between him and Mrs. Studeville, wishing his friend to take time to study Miss Vernon's disposition before he made any absolute declaration.

Alfred

Alfred was delighted at the idea of introducing papa to his fair friend, and they had scarcely reached the downs, ere they saw her advancing at a distance: the sun was powerful, to which the Duke attributed her wearing a veil that completely concealed her features. Alfred would have sprung forward to meet her, but when she came within fifty or sixty yards of them, and saw who was with him, she checked her horse, and took quite a contrary direction. The Duke and Neville laughed at their disappointment, but Alfred could not think why she would not speak to him: she had put her horse into a gallop, and soon quitted the downs.

"She rides admirably!" said the Duke, "whoever she is, and I am ready to make her *amende bonou. able* for my hasty judgment; she evidently neither wishes to excite your or my admiration, Neville, nor to form an acquaintance with us; and I protest her behaviour has heightened my curiosity to see her more than your description."

Thinking

Thinking it not only vain, but absurd, to wait any longer, they returned to the Court. Alfred went out with the old lady and Miss Vernon; the Duke and Neville took a ride: the latter did not return with his Grace, as Lord Fortrose expected him home to dinner. The Duke went immediately to his toilette; and not to prevent the gentlemen from sitting over the bottles, yet not thinking it necessary to keep them company, he now made it a rule to spend an hour in his dressing-room after dinner, before he joined the ladies. Mrs. Studeville had returned at her accustomed hour, and a bright thought having struck her, she hurried over her toilette to examine her hoard of jewels, trinkets, &c. &c.

This amusing occupation prevented her from even thinking of her letters; she therefore left them above stairs, and told Miss Vernon, with a look of exultation, as they went down stairs, she had selected something for his Grace, and meant to make her present that very afternoon. Miss Vernon had frequently

frequently seen all her treasures displayed, and did not recollect ever having observed any thing either fit for the Duke's rank or age. Necklaces, ear-rings, and pompoons, as the old lady called some of her ornaments, were out of the question, though she had a very valuable assortment of these articles; snuff-boxes would be equally absurd, as the Duke never took snuff; and cluster-rings, or any other she had to bestow, would be as much out of character: his father's picture, if she had it, set in brilliants, would be the properest thing in her opinion; however, she asked no questions, as the old lady seemed to wish to surprise her.

Mrs. Studeville, eager to display her generosity, left the dining-room sooner than usual, and asked Miss Vernon to accompany her, to read her letters, which had been forgotten in the bustle. They were hardly seated ere they heard the Duke passing the door in the way to his own dressing-room. "Those vulgar beings have drove his Grace up stairs, niece; is it not abominable to be obliged to suffer

suffer such people to associate with men of his rank? I positively shall order them to go; I foresee it will come to that. But read my letters, child; I lose all patience when I reflect upon my own folly in ever permitting them to enter my doors!"

The first Miss Vernon took up she knew to be from Mr. Dixon, but did not chuse to make the remark, therefore immediately cut the seal, as it was one of the old lady's rules never to have a letter torn open. The moment this was unfolded, two pieces of paper fell at her feet; she picked them up, while the old lady said, "What are those, Grace?"

"Two fifty pounds notes, Madam," was the answer, as she presented them to her aunt.

"Bless me, child, what can this mean? Why these are the very two notes I sent that unfortunate man, that Mr. Dixon! The letter is from him, I presume; pray let me hear what he says—I am astonished!" gazing at the notes while she spoke.

Miss

Miss Vernon, by way of setting her mind at ease, began to read as follows:

“MRS. RACHEL STUDEVILLE.

“MADAM,

“I am very happy my noble friend, and generous, though youthful, benefactor has been able to erase the doubts you seemed to entertain concerning my veracity; the trouble he so kindly took for the most benevolent of purposes, would have been far beneath your dignity!—Had you allowed me time, or deigned to question me, I meant to have explained every thing to your satisfaction. I shall not dwell upon the insults I received in your house. The person you delegated to turn me out, I presume is permitted to stile himself your brother-in-law, at least so he told me; though I must say, I think his behaviour to me perfectly justified the contempt, not to say aversion, Sir Yelverton felt for him; and I am convinced he

found

found a degree of malignant pleasure in your having put it in his power to insult a man so nearly connected with that gentleman; but as I am now, Madam, amply, nay handsomely provided for, I must beg leave to decline accepting the inclosed notes, or any future marks of your bounty; and am

Your most obedient humble servant,

J. STUDEVILLE."

The old lady sat examining the notes while Miss Vernon was reading the letter, and was not absolutely sorry to see so much money returned into her hands; but the sound of the name broke the clue of her ideas. "Studeville! child, you must have made a mistake; give me the letter."

Miss Vernon obeyed.

"I do not doubt your word, child," said she, as she took it, "but it is very extraordinary he dares to sign my family name!" She then looked at the post-mark—"London! well, the Duke's munificence has enabled him to travel; I wish he may make a good use of his income; but extravagance, where

once it takes deep root, is not very easily eradicated. I should only like to know what he expected I should send him ; his refusal is almost an insult to the Duke, in my opinion ; I dare say his Grace would look upon it as such. For my own part, I could have overlooked his returning the money, but to have the assurance to sign the respectable name of Studeville !” The poor old lady took a turn in the room ; then said, “ How did he sign himself in the letter of thanks he wrote the Duke, niece ? you had that in your hand.”

“ J. S. D. Madam,” was the answer.

“ Yes, yes ; and he has left out Dixon now on purpose to provoke me ; but I am determined his impertinence shall not have the wished-for effect ; as the Duke very justly observes, one ought to despise low spite !—Angry, forsooth, I should scorn it.”

Miss Vernon had infinitely rather the old lady had acknowledged she was in a passion ; her affected unconcern was truly burlesque.

Having repeatedly declared she was more inclined to laugh than to be vexed at so paltry a subterfuge as Mr. Dixon had had recourse

to,

ro, in order to revenge himself, because she had not taken him by the hand, and declared him her heir, which was what he no doubt expected; she said, "I am rather at a loss, child, how to act respecting this letter. If his Grace should not ask me whether I have heard from the silly being, I don't think I shall mention his letter; and as I of course shall not answer him, Mr. Dixon's mean spite will be more than half defeated by not knowing to any certainty whether I have or have not received his epistle. Such a sum as it contained is very tempting, and letters of such consequence have been some times missing; and was I to mention this below stairs, I should be tormented to death by that draper's vulgar witticisms: it shall therefore remain for the present, niece, between our two selves."

This she knew was saying enough, and her other letters were now perused. As they were in some respects of a more agreeable nature than the first, by degrees Mrs. Studeville regained some share of composure. She desired Grace to listen for the Duke's going
H 2 down

down stairs, and in less than a quarter of an hour they heard his footsteps in the passage. The letters were immediately deposited in what Mrs. Studeville called her scrutoire, now generally misnamed, as she observed, bureau, out of which at the same time she took an oblong black shagreen case, which she put into her pocket, giving her niece a look and a smile, as much as to say, you shan't see what it is; then having taken a look in the glass to see if all traces of anger upon her countenance had disappeared, "Come, niece," said she, "we will go down to tea."

Miss Vernon had caught but an imperfect view of the case, and as she had no recollection of it, presumed it contained something of great value she had never been favoured with a sight of. All the party were assembled in the saloon; the Duke was looking out of a window, talking to his son, who was jumping about the lawn, but turned round as soon as he heard Mrs. Studeville's voice, and at her request took Alfred in, that he might have

have his tea, which was immediately made. Mr. Chambers was lost in the profundity of his calculations ; the funds had got up three quarters and a half in one day

“Zounds!” said he to Robert, “what a stroke I could have made! Pray are there any such opportunities of making money in Italy, your Grace?”

“Many Italian states have public banks, Sir,” said the Duke, “but as I am not at all versed in the art of stock-jobbing, I am by no means competent to enter upon the subject.”

“Your Grace’s income arises from landed property, I suppose,” said the draper, “but many of our nobility dabble in the stocks I will be sworn, and there are sometimes damned lucky hits to be made that way.”

“His Grace is not desirous of being taught your method of getting money, Sir,” said Mrs. Studeville.

The draper said no more, and little passed during tea. As soon as tea was over, Robert began to remark the length of the days, and

pulled out his watch to calculate how many hours sun there were. No one attended to him, and the Duke put Alfred out again to take another run before his supper. Mrs. Studeville now rose, put her hand into her pocket, and by the time she reached the window at which the Duke was standing, produced the treasure in store for him, which she presented with a most profound courtesy.

“Will your Grace condescend to accept this small token of my gratitude for your noble conduct towards my unfortunate brother-in-law: I offer it in both our names, as I look upon what you did for him as one of the greatest and most delicate compliments you could have paid me.”

The Duke was rather hurt by this studied public harangue, evidently composed with a view to mortify her other guests at the same time it was meant to flatter him; besides, he was very little in the habit of receiving presents, particularly in this public manner: but ever ready to forgive the most absurd action, if it sprung from a good motive,
he

he took the case, determined not to be long in the old lady's debt.

"Your esteem, my dear Madam, is all I ever coveted; and were you to think it necessary thus amply to reward such simple actions as the one you allude to, I am afraid you would soon reduce your income;—for your sake I shall always prize your gift, and when on the other side of the Alps, it will remind me (though I trust I should not have wanted such a memento), of the many agreeable hours I have spent in your society, and will at the same time make me regret the distance that will then separate us."

Mrs. Studeville, gratified beyond measure, returned to her chair, casting a glance around her, and enjoying the mortified countenances of the surrounding group;—her visible exultation was more provoking to the draper than her having bestowed what he presumed was of immense value, upon the object of his aversion. He could hardly conceal his rage when he reflected neither his dear Robert nor his bride, notwithstanding the joyful oc-

caſion had brought them to the Court, had received the ſmalleſt mark of the old lady's favour, and certainly, all things conſidered, as ſhe had invited them, ſhe ought to have made them a handsome preſent. This both the Duke and Miſs Vernon agreed in, though they did not think themſelves authorized to explain their ſentiments to Mrs. Studeville; the latter knew they were very undeſerving, ſtill ſhe ſincerely wiſhed her aunt had not given them reaſon to complain of her want of generoſity. The bride, whoſe unmeaning countenance generally wore an invariable ſmile, ſeemed ready to cry; having fully expected, when ſhe came down, to return loaded with jewels, and had neither ſenſe nor preſence of mind enough to conceal a very deep ſigh, which was remarked by the whole company, and ſerved if poſſible to increaſe the old man's wrath. Robert affected to hum a tune to himſelf; Miſs Rachel ſidged about upon her chair, turned up her noſe, toſſed her head, and would have ſaid, "I don't care," had ſhe ſpoken at all, by way of concealing her

her envy. James Vernon, whatever his private thoughts might be, carried it off much the best; he had his countenance under much greater subjection than the draper, and was to all appearance very much pleased. Miss Vernon was rather curious, therefore hoped the Duke would gratify the company with a sight of his present, as the more she looked at the case, the less she could conceive what it contained.

The Duke, who easily guessed the donor wished to have whatever she had given him exhibited to view, opened the case, smilingly observing, "I must see how greatly I am indebted to you, my dear Madam."

But the moment he had gratified his curiosity, he wished most fervently he had suspended it, as he had the utmost difficulty to look serious; however, to prevent any of the company from perceiving his inclination to laugh, he immediately turned his back upon them, apparently to examine his present in a better light. Miss Vernon began to think it was something very absurd by the Duke's

sudden movement, and the arch expression of his eyes, which had not escaped her notice the moment he caught sight of what the case contained. In less than a minute his Grace turned round, holding in his left hand an immense gold chased watch, with a dial plate of the same metal; the chain was perfectly adequate to the ponderous burthen it was intended to support, and perfectly corresponded in every respect with the watch.

His Grace affected great admiration, and bestowed several well-judged encomiums upon the workmanship, which was certainly exquisite of its kind.

The old lady, more and more pleased, now informed his Grace, it had been presented to an ancestor of Sir Roger de Courcy's on the field of battle, and was handed down in that family as an heirloom, till Sir Yelverton de Studeville married the eldest daughter of the late Sir Roger de Courcy, who bestowed it upon him on his wedding-day. My father generally wore it, and I will be answerable
for

for its going in any climate without varying three minutes in the twelvemonth."

The Duke said that made it truly valuable, but added, with a smile he could not suppress, "A modern buck, in the present degenerate age, would scarce be able to carry its weight."

He next admired three seals, depending from the chain, which Mrs. Studeville undertook to explain, rising for that purpose. The whole party followed her example, eager to get a peep, as Mr. Chambers observed, at this antique; however, they were forced to remain in the back-ground till Mrs. Studeville had displayed her knowledge in heraldry. "These," said she, "your Grace, are the arms of the de Studevilles, as borne by my father before marriage; these are those of the de Courcys; and these are the former with the latter, (as it is customary in England when a gentleman marries an heiress) in an escutcheon of pretence. The Studeville motto is particularly celebrated, and was conspicuous upon the shields of their ancestors

tors in Palestine—*Foi et Espérance* ;—your Grace, I presume, quarters the Melton and de Courcy arms with those of your noble maternal ancestors ?”

“No, really, Madam; I merely bear those of the Ferrara and St. Severino families, agreeably to the desire of my maternal grandfather.”

“Will your Grace permit me to look at your seal?” said the old lady.

The Duke instantly pulled out a very elegant repeater, set in jewels, from the chain of which depended the seal in question, and put it into her hands.

“Upon my word, your Grace, this is a most magnificent little bauble ! I thought the watch I usually wear small, but it is immense in comparison to this.”

She next admired the chain, while the Duke put her present into his waistcoat pocket, as the best calculated to hold it; but upon Robert's request to take a nearer survey of it, he presented it to him, and the family

family group retired to another window, while Mrs. Studeville examined the Duke's seal.

After the young people had given their opinion of this precious relic, the draper took it into his hand, and having poised both that and the chain, made a few calculations; then returned it to the Duke, saying, "A very noble present indeed, my Lord Duke, a very fine time-piece to set upon a chimney in a handsome case. I do not think the chain is such pure gold as the watch; yet I dare say the two would not fetch less than thirty or five and thirty guineas, if they were knocked to pieces, and sold for old gold."

The poor draper certainly did not mean to offend, but he was seldom fortunate in his remarks. Mrs. Studeville gave him one of those pleasant looks he always shrunk from—

"You might have spared yourself your calculation, Sir; his Grace, I am convinced, does not mean to convert it into ready money."

"Dear me, Madam, that was the farthest from my thoughts when I spoke; I only valued it as I should have done old plate, or
any

any thing else out of fashion. I know it is one thing to buy, and another to sell, but I always judge every thing by its intrinsic worth; though I am sure I meant no harm, nor no disparagement to your noble present, not I."

"No doubt, no doubt, Mr. Chambers," said the old lady, to prevent him from continuing his remarks, presenting the watch she had been admiring to the Duke.

His Grace drew back, saying, "It is not the fashion in any country now, my dear Madam, to wear two watches; the one you have in your hand is much more calculated for a lady than a gentleman, and may sometimes remind you of your absent cousin; besides I really cannot deprive you of one so infinitely more valuable, in many respects, upon any other condition."

The old lady was staggered, though much pleased, and for some moments hardly knew whether she ought to take advantage of her generous cousin's liberality; therefore, with some hesitation, replied, "Upon my honour, your Grace, I can't think —" The Duke's
look

look made her pause, and then say, "For the world I would not offend your Grace, but indeed this is a present I was so unprepared to receive, and so truly elegant, I am at a loss to express myself as I could wish upon the occasion; I can only say, I will wear it while I live, in commemoration of the kind condescension that induced you to honour Studeville Court with your presence."

A profound courtesy succeeded her speech, and she retreated to her chair. There were few people to whom the Duke would have offered, thus unceremoniously, a trinket he had worn. But though Mrs. Studeville was what she thought very refined in her notions, she often unintentionally hurt the feelings of those she most wished to oblige, and had in the present instance rather wounded those of the Duke; he was therefore doubly eager to cancel the obligation her generosity had thus publicly, and, in his opinion, indelicately, laid him under. The praises she bestowed upon his watch, afforded him an almost instantaneous opportunity, which he very gladly seized;

seized; determined, as he told the old lady, upon no other terms to retain what he would very gladly have been excused accepting.

The poor draper, who, from not having been early taught to govern his temper, now found it a most difficult task, upon seeing the spinster returning to her chair in so much better temper than himself, could not refrain from endeavouring, as he afterwards owned, "to let her down a peg or so," exclaimed in an expressive tone, "Faith, Madam, you made a pretty good swap of that, let me tell you! — Egad, that was gaining cent. per cent."

"Sir!" said she, stopping suddenly, and fixing her eyes upon him, "neither the Duke di Ferrara nor myself barter for gain!" and proceeded to her chair.

"There by —" the draper swallowed the word, and took his seat almost at the same moment, flung one leg over the other, and seemed in perpetual motion, through the efforts he made to conceal his anger; but, too well aware of the consequence of quarrelling with the old lady,

lady, he with difficulty repressed the inclination he felt, and as it grew dusk, the variations in his countenance were the less obvious.

The Duke took his son in, and was going to leave the room, when Geoffry threw the door open unusually wide, announcing the "Earl of Melton."

Mr. Chambers had assured his family he did not care three pence about this proud old jockey, nay only wished he might come to the Court while he was there, that he might shew him he was not born in a wood to be scared by an owl; yet he was the first to start from his chair, and retreat behind it. Mrs. Studeville rose also in great haste, saying, "What an agreeable surprise!"

By this time the Earl was within the room, and the whole party standing to receive him. His Lordship seemed in very high spirits, but hardly allowed himself time to address his niece, before he turned to his beloved grandson, exclaiming—

"The air of England seems to agree with your Grace:—you must place this visit solely to the
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the Duke di Ferrara's account, niece, for believe me, my heart has been at Studeville Court ever since I learnt he was become your guest." He then caught Alfred in his arms, upon whom he bestowed several kisses, and was rejoiced, he said, "to find himself hailed by the title of grand-papa."

The Duke expressed the real pleasure he felt at seeing him, while his niece in more formal terms welcomed his arrival. Compliments being over, the Earl looked round with some degree of surprise. Mrs. Studeville did not expect him so soon, or she would have desired the draper and his family to have decamped rather than his Lordship should have found them in her house. The Earl knew the old fellow by sight, though he did not chuse to acknowledge as much, nor did he expect to have met him in Gloucestershire; for having blamed his niece very severely for ever having permitted them to become her guests, she had not chose to inform him of their present visit, much less that they came by invitation;—the joy, therefore, she felt upon
his

his first arrival, was considerably damped by the reflection that she must introduce these despised Cits to his notice. His Lordship addressed Miss Vernon very politely, and the old lady having summoned courage to her assistance during the compliments that were passing, said, when the Earl turned about, "Mr. Vernon, my dear uncle, my niece's brother; the two Mr. Mrs. and Miss Chambers."

The Peer deigned to return the young counsellor's profound bow, but made a slight inclination of the head in return for the obsequious reverence paid him by the draper's family; and immediately turning to the Duke, said, "I have a thousand things to talk over with your Grace. I presume there is a fire in the library, suppose we adjourn thither?" The Duke smiled assent, perfectly guessing the *important* reason which induced the Earl to make such an indecorous proposal the moment he arrived:—his Lordship took his Grace's arm, and accompanied by Alfred, who was going to supper, they left the saloon,

to

to the infinite mortification of the poor old lady, who fearful she should quarrel with the set that had induced the Earl to treat her so cavalierly, followed them out accompanied by Miss Vernon, meaning to retire to her own dressing-room; but as they were still in the hall, the Earl, satisfied with having convinced her he deemed her present inmates very unfit society for him, called out, "The Duke and I have no secrets to discuss, niece; therefore shall be glad of your company."

From any other person such an invitation would have excited disdain, but from "my uncle," the Earl, it was only kindly familiar; she courtied, promised to attend them in a few minutes, and went into the eating parlour to give some orders to her niece respecting supper, who was to convey them to the housekeeper.

Miss Vernon then returned into the saloon, where she found the astonished party rather recovering from the confusion the arrival of Lord Melton had thrown them into. They began to be accustomed to the Duke;—

he

he was a foreigner ; his youth and affability eased them from the restraint they ever felt in the presence of a titled man ! but none of them knew how they must behave to this arrogant old peer, whom the draper affected to despise from the bottom of his soul. He was the first who broke silence, by saying, in a spiteful tone—

“What, you are not of the party to-night, Grace ? Well, don’t be cast down, girl ; the old maid only treats you as she does the rest of us ; we make very good cat’s-paws ! Ha ! Bob ! however, for my own part, I think their room is better than their company !—Would to God that old blackguard had broke his neck in his damned hurry to see his grandson ! to be sure he has more need to court the young fellow than the Duke has to palaver him, for he will never be a six-penny-piece the better, I dare say, for what my Lord has got to leave behind him ; and if the old fellow thinks I care a brass farthing for him, why he’s damnably mistaken, that’s all !—If I don’t keep my carriage, mayhap
t’ant

t'ant because I could not afford it as well as him; and what is his title to me?—I live as well as he does any day in the year, and have got as good wine in my cellar.”

Thus did the draper run on, and was ably supported by his whole family; even James, who was ever cautious of saying too much before him, (knowing he would not scruple repeating his words to the spinster if it suited his purpose), agreed the Earl was not renowned for his affability.

“I would not take two to one, Jem,” said the draper, “but we are all ordered to troop to-morrow, now my uncle, the Earl, has come; and I will be damned if I go for one without she sings out quite plain;—the old curmudgeon shan’t have it to say he frightened Bob Chambers and his family from the Court!—Ha! boys and girls, what say you?”

They all agreed he was in the right, and all but Miss Vernon had something to say expressive of their dislike of his Lordship, who, on his side, was not at all more cordially inclined towards them; for the moment the
old

old lady joined him and the Duke, he exclaimed—

“For heaven’s sake, niece, what do you do with that Mr. Chambers and his family in your house? I am surprised my admonitions upon that subject have not had more effect! You are in the right to give up visiting your neighbours, if you chuse to associate with such a low set.”

Mrs. Studeville, who revered her uncle most when he most displayed his greatest failing, excused herself from the circumstance of the wedding that had so lately taken place in the Chambers family; and as the Duke was present, ventured to acknowledge she had invited them for a fortnight, which they had already extended to a month.

“And will stay another if you do not turn them out,” said the Earl; “however, I must say it was no more than you had every reason to expect; all that amazes me is, that you should have asked the Duke di Ferrara to become your guest while you had such visitors! It must be truly flattering to his Grace to
associate

associate with such a set! If you must give them entrance into your house, why don't you depute your steward and housekeeper to do the honours to such beings? *Their* apartments are far more calculated for them than *your* saloon; and their conversation rather more suited to such company."

The Duke affected to suppose the Earl merely in joke, and spoke of the draper and his children as a part of the Studeville family, acknowledging, "Their manners were not very refined, but their remarks were sometimes, for that very reason, the more piquant." In short, he rallied the old Peer out of all his proud scruples, and silly mistaken notions of greatness, to the no small satisfaction of the old lady, who was rather afraid she must have had supper served in two different rooms.

Meanwhile the draper was wondering if "the old stiff-necked fellow could humble himself so far as to set down to table with a commoner; he knew it would go devilishly against the grain if he did."

However,

However, to his great surprise, his Lordship accompanied the Duke and Mrs. Studeville into the eating-room; the latter placed her noble guests to the right and left of her, made a slight inclination of the head to the rest of the party, and allowed them to arrange themselves how they pleased, while she began to carve even before they had taken their seats.

Notwithstanding the draper's boasted courage, he seemed afraid to sit too near the table; and if the Earl happened to look his way, his supercilious glances were merely intended to remind him of his insignificance. Not one of the party even raised their eyes, or opened their mouths but to eat; so completely are narrow minds awed by pompous dignity. The Earl's pride seemed to increase in proportion to their humility. Miss Vernon had expected, after all she had been listening to, the draper would have attempted to familiarize himself with the Earl; but found even her brother participate in the *mauvaise bonte*, though his education ought to have made

made him company for the first people in the kingdom; but poverty had depressed his former assurance, and, conscious of his errors, he sunk under the salutary chastening rod of adversity. The Earl addressed himself wholly to the Duke during supper, every now and then introducing a French or Italian phrase in his discourse, expressive of his dislike to the surrounding party. Mrs. Studeville was very much hurt, yet blamed herself much more than the Earl, and sincerely wished she had not submitted so tamely to Mr. Chambers's encroachments; however, once out of her house, she consoled herself with reflecting he should never more enter it again by invitation.

As soon as the cloth was drawn, and the servants retired, she pressed her uncle to taste her Madeira.

"I never drink my wine pure after supper, niece," said the Peer, "but shall have no objection to a tumbler of wine and water."

There were no large glasses upon the table; Mrs. Studeville desired James to ring the

the bell: the draper made a move, and Robert jumped up, eager to display his zeal, and had a sort of scuffle with James to reach the bell, and then to seize the string. During their bustle the Duke perceiving a variety of glasses of different sizes upon the sideboard, said, "You need not trouble yourselves, gentlemen!" rising from his chair while he spoke; and while the rival candidates for the honour of ringing the bell were staring at him for an explanation, his Grace had placed a tumbler before the Earl.

Each returned to his seat very much mortified. Lord Melton was very much flattered by this attention of the Duke's, and expressed his thanks for the trouble his Grace had taken, in terms sufficiently demonstrative of his satisfaction; but as the Duke was seating himself again, the Earl was struck with something that hit against the edge of the table: his Lordship's forehead was immediately wrinkled, while he took a second glance at the object which had attracted his notice, and almost instantly said, "Pray, your
I 2 Grace

Grace, how goes time; your watch seems very near your hand?"

The chain, which had so forcibly attracted the Earl, was hanging out of the Duke's pocket, that it might not break the glass of the diminutive gift he had so lately received: curiosity alone induced the Earl to ask the foregoing question, as he was anxious to see what sort of a pendulum was affixed to such a delicate chain, which he did not remember having seen his Grace wear during his stay in town.

The Duke, with all the composure of countenance he could assume, pulled out the precious relic, and said, "It is five and twenty minutes past ten, my Lord."

"Will your Grace allow me to look at that *small* watch?" said the Earl; "the size and weight of the chain first struck me."

His Lordship was rather afraid of offending his illustrious grandson, therefore did not give way to his mirth when the light bauble was put into his hand, but turned it about, and with the utmost difficulty suppressed his smiles,

smiles, till having raised his eyes, wishing to be guided in the remarks he might make by the expression of the Duke's countenance, and perceiving his Grace had still more difficulty than himself to check his risibility, the Earl ventured to smile, while he observed, "Italy is famous for antiques, your Grace; are you going to try to bring them into fashion in England?"

"That is not originally an Italian time-piece, my Lord, though its antiquity, as your Lordship observes, will no doubt make it universally admired in that country."

The Earl instantly guessed, and the seals confirmed his suspicions, to whom his Grace was indebted for this, as he very justly thought, absurd gift. No longer afraid of offending, he said, "Upon my honour, some of our young men of fashion would find this an insupportable burthen! If it was mine, I would have it fastened to a pole, and carried after me between two of my servants, as Gulliver's watch was at Lilliput. But, for heaven's sake, where did your Grace pick up

such an old fashioned time-piece, and what can induce you to encumber yourself in such a manner?"

The Duke, who could not help meeting the eyes of the Earl, and seeing in imagination his elegant watch slung like a beer barrel, was no longer able to preserve his gravity, though he placed his mirth solely to the Earl's remark, replying, "You have, no doubt, seen that watch before, my Lord, as it once belonged to Sir Yelverton de Studeville, and was bestowed on me only a few hours ago by my good cousin."

The Peer had perfectly recollected to whom it had formerly belonged before this explanation, but did not chuse to say so, and now burst into a violent fit of laughter; such a gift struck him as being so truly ludicrous! When he could speak, he said, looking at Mrs. Studeville, who was already very much disconcerted, "Why, niece, I wonder you did not also bestow Sir Yelverton's tie wig, and Sir Roger de Courcy's brass basket-hilted sword upon the Duke; I should have thought
either

either of those as suitable to his age and rank as this enormous soup-dish, which requires all my strength to lift."

The Earl's raillery occasioned a general sort of titter at the bottom of the table, which encouraged his Lordship to proceed.

"Your Grace may find the chain of great use on a hill upon your return to Naples, should the one affixed to your carriage give way; for I think this would lock the wheel of a waggon!"

Mrs. Studeville, though never more angry in her life, did not like to appear offended, and even forced a laugh, which afforded the rest of the company an excellent opportunity to have their "*Ha! ha! ha!*" out; and when the vociferous mirth of the draper's family permitted her to speak, she said, "Really, my dear uncle, I am happy to see you in such excellent spirits. I did not presume my noble cousin would constantly wear my gift; I merely thought it having belonged to his paternal ancestors, might make it in some degree worthy his acceptance."

The Earl was striking it while she was speaking; then answered, "Why it would almost supply the place of a village-clock! Had you given it me, niece, I would have placed it over my stables at Melton Abbey, where it would have been particularly useful both to myself and neighbours."

The Duke wishing to relieve the poor old woman, and put an end to the Earl's sarcasms, said, "I am very happy it did not fall to his Lordship's share, my dear cousin, as, its real value apart, it will ever remind me of your past and present favours, and of my first journey to England."

This last remark put a momentary damp, as his Grace expected, upon the Earl's mirth. It brought to his remembrance his past behaviour, and reminded him to whom he owed his existence: he said, therefore, with an expressive smile, "I shall need no memento, your Grace, while I breathe, to remind me of your arrival in Albion!"

The Duke affected not to observe this oblique compliment, and replaced the watch in his waistcoat pocket. The

The old lady now thought it but right to shew the Earl the one she had received in exchange.

"This is truly elegant," said his Lordship; "and had I thought of making the Duke di Ferrara a present, I should have given his Grace something like this."

"Fashionable trinkets, my dear uncle, I knew the Duke either has, or could easily purchase."

The Earl smiled, as much as to say, you might have found a worse excuse. The Chambers family had been highly amused, though they had not attempted to join in the conversation; but finding the old Earl so gay, they began to think report had not done him justice. The draper drew near the table, leant his elbows upon it, and opened his mouth several times before he could summon resolution enough to speak: but his Lordship having returned the watch to the old lady, and made some comments upon its value, he ventured to alledge, "Mrs. Studeville did not lose much by that swap, my Lord."

The Earl made no answer, and began to mix his tumbler of wine and water. The draper hitched back again upon his chair, and looked at Robert. The Earl soon after complained of fatigue, and Mrs. Studeville would accompany him to his apartment—the Duke did him the same honour; indeed his Grace was ever studious to shew him that respect he thought his age and relationship entitled him to expect;—the rest of the party rose to bow and courtesy, but the moment the door closed after them, the draper exclaimed, “The devil and sixpence go with you, you old rip; then you will have money and company! Why, Grace, your nose is quite out of joint, girl; you an’t allowed to attend the great man to his room.” He then uttering a few more execrations, struck the table with his fist, and took a turn in the room,—stopped suddenly,—calling out, “Fill the glasses, Bob, fill the glasses, boy, that I may drink a good repose to our dear uncle.” Robert obeyed: and the old man taking up his, exclaimed with vehemence, “May he sleep, and never
wake;

wake ; and the Devil his soul and body take !” tossing off his glass as he concluded.

Miss Vernon left the room, absolutely shocked at such expressions.

The old fellow laughed at her hasty retreat, saying, “ Grace gets damned squeamish of late :—but did you mind, my Lord was too proud to answer me, though I have spoke to his betters many’s the time and often !—Surely the devil will one of these days, when he an’t busy, form himself into a hillock of dirt, and tip the old scoundrel over before he is aware of it !”

“ Dear me, papa,” said Miss Rachel, interrupting him, “ you should not make use of such expressions before ladies ; you have frightened my cousin away, you find.”

“ What care I for her, or you either ; I can’t keep my temper when I think, much more when I talk, about a man we have all such reason to curse !—What brought him down here but this Duke, (who is a prince in comparison to him, I must say) ; but if this grandson had been a commoner, like me, he

might have starved for what he would have cared."

They all agreed he was in the right ; but as the Earl had it in his power to do them a great deal of harm, they thought they had better endeavour to please him while they did stay ; indeed the draper foresaw they must soon be gone, if my Lord meant to spend any time at the Court, for he would only try to make mischief, which he could not do so well if they were not present ; but he would tell them his determination in the morning.

He then rejoiced that the Earl had cut up her old trumpery watch, which she only gave the Duke in hopes of being repaid ten-fold, "and, damn her, she has succeeded but too well. If I had been the young fellow, she might have cried her eyes out before I would have bestowed such a handsome present upon her ; worth two hundred pounds the least farthing, I will be sworn, and in exchange for a gingerbread toy, as a body may say, he can never make any use of ; but if I had ventured to have said half as much about it as my
uncle

uncle did, the house would soon have been too hot to hold us both ! however, that she may not think we are setting up to eat her out of house and home, (a miserly old cat !) let's be moving."

This was readily agreed to, and each retired to ruminate upon the occurrences of the evening.

CHAP. VIII.

BY nine o'clock the following morning the draper and his family were assembled in the breakfast-parlour, much more dressed than usual, by the old man's orders, that they might not disgrace Mrs. Studeville : not that

he

he cared about my Lord, (he would have scorned to have acknowledged such a thing), and soon began to wonder whether the great man was stirring, or how long he meant to keep breakfast waiting. His suspense was not of long duration, as Miss Vernon soon appeared, and begged they would make their own breakfast; the Duke and Earl were to take their's in the old lady's dressing-room, and she was, as usual, to make their tea.

"I am heartily glad of it, Grace," said the draper; "would to God my Lord would dine and sup there too as long as he stays!—How long is that to be, child? A few days I think he said."

"A few weeks, Sir, I believe his Lordship intended," said Miss Vernon.

"The devil he does! then, by Jove, I shall be off before him."

This was so exactly what every body in the house wished, that finding what she had said was likely to accelerate their departure, she assured them the Earl did not talk of returning to town before the birth-day, she understood

derstood ; leaving them to brood over her information.

During breakfast the draper said, " I foresee there is very little chance of our seeing the house cleared of these great folks ; however, we shall see how the cat jumps when the old lady comes down, if she should shew us any of her quality airs, which, look ye, tis ten to one she does, I will tell her t'an't in our power to trespass any longer upon her hospitality, and that we must leave her to-morrow ! This, mind ye, will be getting off with flying colours."

His family, of course, were of his way of thinking, and they soon arranged how they should travel, and every other *et cetera* ; but were hardly able to decide whether it would be polite to leave the house to take a walk before they saw the Earl. James, to whom they generally applied in such cases, said, " it might be construed into an affront : " they therefore stayed at home, the draper only pacing the room now and then, and calling down blessings upon Lord Melton for preventing

venting him from enjoying so fine a morning.

At last, however, Mrs. Studeville came in, attended by the Duke, Earl Alfred, and Miss Vernon; the old lady slightly paid them the compliments of the morning; the Earl made a formal bow, but never spoke; the Duke addressed them as usual.

His Lordship then said, "I am at your Grace's orders, and I think the sooner we reach Neville-House, the more likely we are to find Lord Fortrose and his son at home. The Duke immediately rang the bell, and gave orders for his carriage; but before any one had taken a seat, Mr. Vernon, who was standing near one of the windows, said, "I believe you may expect some visitors, Madam; there is a carriage stopped at the gate, and now coming round the sweep."

All eyes were of course directed the same way.

"Who can it be?" said the old lady; "somebody either to the Duke or Earl though I should suppose?"

The

The former said he did not expect any body; and the latter, that none of his friends knew of his being at the Court, or it might have been as she thought.

A very handsome post chaise and four was now advancing upon a smart trot, followed by two out-riders: as it drew near, the Duke, who had advanced towards Mr. Vernon, said, "I should presume it is some of the Studeville family; at least this gentleman or lady, whichever it is, gives the same livery with you, Madam."

Mrs. Studeville smiled—"I believe, your Grace, I am the only survivor of that family who gives a livery."

"I may be mistaken, Madam," said the Duke, "liveries are not the same distinction in England they are upon the Continent; but I really think, though I had but a transient glance, the family arms you were explaining to me last night, are upon this carriage: I am certain the crest is a lion rampant upon a cap of liberty."

"You

"You astonish me, your Grace," said the spinster, approaching the Duke; but the carriage had stopped at the great door, and was no longer in sight of the windows.

"This an't a bastard brother, I will warrant me," said the draper to Robert in a whisper.

In a few seconds the door opened, and Geoffry announced Mr. Studeville! It would be difficult to conceive the shock the old lady felt; she flung herself into the first chair she came to; every one else remained standing, more or less anxious to see this unexpected visiter. Geoffry remained with the door in his hand; the Earl, astonished at the sort of general consternation that seemed to prevail, said in an ironical tone, "Do you receive this relation or not, niece?"

The spinster, excessively fluried, replied in a tremulous voice, "Certainly, uncle; I certainly mean to see the gentleman:—shew him in here, Geoffry;—who can it be?"

"Why what can occasion the causeless terror you seem to be in?" said the Earl;

"are

"are you afraid of being run away with, or what can you have to dread?"

Too much agitated to attend to his Lordship, she took out her smelling-bottle, and never found it more needful, as Geoffry retreated, the moment he had received her orders, to make way for the very person who had made his appearance the week before under the name of Dixon. Mrs. Studeville did intend to have received him standing; but the instant she caught sight of his face, and found all her suspicions, occasioned by the letter she had received, confirmed, she fell back into her chair, and, but for her salts, would have been in some danger of fainting. The draper, who had shoved forward to get a good view of the stranger, was still more eager to make his retreat; all that had passed during the old gentleman's last visit, rushed so forcibly upon his memory, that, could he have done it unperceived, he would certainly have flunk out of the room; as it was, he got behind his son.

The

The Earl looked first at his niece, and then at the Duke, whose astonishment far surpassed the old lady's; convinced his bounty had not enabled Mr. Studeville to set up his carriage and four, even with the additional hundred he had sent him from his sister, which his Grace did not know had been returned.

Mr. Studeville was very genteelly dressed for an elderly man, and as soon as he was within the door, stopped, and made a very respectful bow to the Duke; then paid the same compliment in a more general way, and advanced towards his sister, whom he regarded in silence; till, after two unsuccessful efforts, she was able to say, "I think you are the same person who was here some little time since, Sir, under the name of Dixon?"

"You are very right, Madam; and I have ventured once more to intrude upon your leisure, to explain the motives that induced me to pay you the visit to which you allude, and am sanguine enough to hope they will exculpate me in the eyes of the Duke di Ferrara, (again bowing to his Grace). I was, as I
very

very truly told you, just risen from a sick bed, and during a long and tedious illness, I often reflected in what manner I ought to dispose of the property I had to leave behind me. I have already informed you, Madam, how nearly I am connected to the Studeville family, and having no children, I own I wished to enrich the most deserving of Sir Yelverton's descendants. This led me to assume the disguise I appeared under when I last presented myself at Studeville Court, knowing great part, indeed I understood all the family were assembled here; and I presumed, Madam, had you even seen me alone, and permitted me to convince you I was no needy sharper, come to prey upon your credulity, you would have consulted your guests upon what ought to be done. I thought I should be able to judge what use they would make of my money, by the manner in which they disposed of their own; and as I have no friends or acquaintance in this part of England, I was convinced I ran very little risk of being known."

Here

Here the old gentleman paused; and putting his hand into his waistcoat pocket, took out something wrapped in a piece of paper, which he laid upon a table near him, then said—

“There are the twelve shillings and sixpence I received from the Studeville family! I do not know in what proportions it was given. I was merely told, when it was put into my hands, one nobleman present had not chose to increase the large collection! and his subsequent actions have convinced me his generous soul deemed me either worthy of a much larger sum, or totally undeserving his or any one’s notice. As for the hundred pounds you deigned to send me, Madam, after my illustrious benefactor had convinced you I was Sir Yelverton Studeville’s son, and your brother-in-law, had you been equally bountiful when I made myself known to you, or had you then told me you would have spared me a trifle out of your immense income, which you can neither spend yourself, nor seem at all inclined to share with the

poor and needy, I would have accepted your offers, as I did those of the Duke di Ferrara, with thanks and gratitude: but when I found I owed your present merely to pride and ostentation, I could despise the offer, (his looks said the donor). But there is another part of my conduct I wish to clear also to your satisfaction:—here is a letter, Madam, (presenting one to Mrs. Studeville), “that will convince you I had my father’s permission, nay his orders, to assume the name and arms of Studeville at his decease.”

The old lady started at the sight of the paper, and retreated from it as if it had been a scorpion.

“I presume you are perfectly satisfied, Madam,” said the old gentleman very coolly, “or are as little inclined to investigate the truth of this matter as you were into my former story, which was in many respects perfectly true. I most certainly spent the first ten thousand pounds I received from my much-to-be-revered father, and disposed of my commission as I have already told you; but

but instead of retiring into Scotland with the last money I obtained from Sir Yelverton, and the trifling remains of my former fortune, I withdrew to Chepstow, in Monmouthshire, from whence I had a distant view of this spot, then the residence of my father. Having been brought up in Yorkshire, there was little chance, I thought, of my being known there. Sir Yelverton seldom or ever crossed the water, or went into Wales, and he might have passed through the town a thousand times without happening to stumble upon me. To hear privately of his welfare constituted my greatest felicity ! In a short time after I had taken up my abode at Chepstow, I was fortunate enough to be received as an under clerk in a very respectable merchant's house, in whose hands I had placed my little fortune, and at the end of two years, having formed a friendship with one of the elder clerks, to whose instruction and advice I was infinitely indebted, we bought a lottery ticket between us, and it came up a ten thousand pounds prize. With that sum, and what we

could

could raise besides, we began the world with happy prospects: our master resigned his business to us, which we carried on with the utmost success for the ensuing ten years, about which time Sir Yelverton died. I mourned for him very sincerely, and reproached myself for not having let him know what became of me after my regiment went abroad: had I heard of his illness, or been apprized in time of his danger, I should most certainly have waited upon him to implore his forgiveness of my past follies, and to inform him how eligibly I was then situated, confident it would have afforded him infinite comfort in his last moments, as I can give you a convincing proof how dear I was to him, notwithstanding the bad use he no doubt learnt I had made of his former bounty, and that I had, unknown to him, disposed of my commission. With a person who was in the secret of my birth, a friend to both, he left twenty thousand pounds, to be delivered to me, if I was ever heard of after his death; and a letter containing his last blessing, with

an order to assume the name and arms I now bear. His and my worthy friend immediately put advertisements into every different newspaper, that must be understood by me he knew, had they fallen in my way. I was, upon making myself known to that person, immediately put in possession of my father's noble bequest, which made me much richer than my friend, who died about twelve years ago, leaving me his sole heir; he was a widower, and left two very distant infirm relations, upon whom, as soon as it was in his power, he had settled very genteel annuities for their lives. I continued in business till within the last six years, when I retired, to make way for others who wished to follow the same career, and purchased a seat, (no matter where), for I am certain, Madam, you don't wish to know any more about a man you, no doubt, look upon as a scandal to your family!—My last visit has enabled me to decide how to dispose of the fruits of my father's bounty and my own industry; it has therefore

therefore perfectly answered the purposed end."

Turning towards the Duke, who had been a very attentive auditor, and was pleased with many of the old gentleman's sentiments, Mr. Studeville, in the most polite, respectful, feeling manner, expressed his gratitude for the numerous favours he had received from his Grace, and concluded—

"I hope your Grace will now permit me to return what I obtained, though for the best of motives, certainly under a very false pretence!" presenting the money, while he held a sealed packet, containing the deed of annuity in his other hand.

The Duke refused the purse, saying, "I must intreat that trifle may be disposed of according to the original intention, my dear Sir, and you must condescend to become my almoner upon the occasion?"

"I would not offend your Grace for half what I am worth!" said Mr. Studeville; "that parcel contains a deed which must ever be recorded in the annals of generosity. You must allow

me to leave it with you, (laying it down while he spoke), and if your Grace will permit me to offer a few sweetmeats I put in my pocket for that purpose, to the Marquis di St. Severino, you will considerably add to the obligations you have conferred upon me."

The little fellow was sitting upon Lord Melton's knee: "You are very good, Sir, said the Duke; "Alfred, pray come and thank this gentleman for having remembered you."

The Marquis was set down, and Mr. Studeville presented him with a paper parcel, gave him almost a paternal kiss, then said, "Allow me to wish you a good morning, my Lord Duke," bowed distinctly to Lord Melton, who returned the compliment—slightly to his now humble sister, and hastened out of the room: the Duke accompanied him into the hall, received his adieu once more at the great door, and saw him set off full speed.

His Grace immediately returned into the breakfast-room; not a word had passed during
his

his momentary absence, but he was not allowed to sit down, before Alfred, who had been very busily employed in opening his parcel, ran up to him—"Only look, papa, did you ever see such a pretty box? and here is another! how am I to open them?"

"Upon my word," said the Duke, "your sweetmeats are inclosed in a very elegant case; I never saw two handsomer *bombonnières*;* but this one is for Roger; your kind friend desires you would eat its present contents, and replenish it at Naples, when you give it your brother."

"Oh! Roger shall have his choice, papa; which do you think is the prettiest?"

"I should be puzzled to decide, Alfred," replied the Duke.

The boxes were each of rock chrystal, the hinges diamonds; upon the lid of one was a beautiful miniature representation of the bay of Naples, &c. set round with jewels; upon the other a view of some of the ruins of ancient Rome, ornamented the same. The

* Boxes adapted for sugar-plums, or lozenges.

Earl begged to look at them, and bestowed some very just encomiums upon both, but was so much at a loss to comprehend great part of the preceding scene, that he was particularly anxious to question the Duke, and felt his pride increase by the reflection that this amiable, generous, much-revered, and respected young man, was his grandson! Mrs. Studeville was so mortified, and so sunk in her own esteem, she was hardly able to admire the elegant present her young favourite had received.

The draper perceived her vexation, and thinking she was never more in need of consolation, stepped forward, the Earl having left her side, and drawn the Duke towards one of the windows, who, while they were both apparently admiring the boxes, was giving his Lordship, in Italian, a very summary account of Mr. Studeville's former visit. The coast, therefore, being what the old man termed clear, he began, with a sort of half laugh—"Lord, my dear Madam, what signifies sighing about, and taking to heart, what that

that there old Don has said? In your place I should not value his gossip a pinch of snuff; he has taken the family name to be sure, but what of that, he can't take the main chance! and for his calling himself your brother, Madam, before your face, why it was only to provoke you, that was all;—so don't take on about the matter; he can't take your name in law, and if he was impudent enough, why I would make him prove his right to it, if I was in your place; though it is hardly worth while going to law about such nonsense, for what is it to you if he calls himself Jack of Nokes, or Tom of Styles? You know the old saying, Madam, the more you stir a t—d, the more it stinks! He is but a bastard after all, and he don't want to have that made public; he would lose all his consequence if it was known. He would not say where he lived;—no! no! he knew a trick worth two of that; and as I tell you again and again, Madam, he only wanted to provoke you."

This consoling harangue quite roused the spinster from her train of disagreeable reflec-

tions. She observed the Earl's eyes upon her, and the sarcastic expression of his countenance provoked her, if possible, more than what Mr. Chambers had said; she therefore hastily interrupted her tormentor, with—"I desire, Sir, you would not trouble me with your absurd remarks; Sir Yelverton Studville had a right to confer his name upon whom he chose, and his son is a gentleman, and, in my opinion, your superior."

"But my mother was an honest woman than his, Madam," said the draper; "and as for his rigmarole story about his money, why, thank God, you don't want it, nor his sugar-plums neither! He thought this fine tale would make you remember him in your will—nothing else, take my word for it; but I hope you will live to see him, and me, and a dozen more such out yet; so, Madam, don't go to fume and fret your guts to fiddle-strings all about nothing."

"Once more, Mr. Chambers," said the old lady in a rage, "I desire you will hold
your

your tongue ; when I want your advice, I will ask it!"

"Well, Madam, I hope no offence; I have done," said the draper.

"I only wish you had never begun, Sir! It was you led me into my first error: however I am very happy to find my brother is not in want of my protection."

The draper entered warmly upon his defence; but the old lady, in her present temper, could not even listen to him with common patience. She rose in the middle of his speech, and walked to the window, where the Duke and Earl were standing, and began once more to admire the *bonbonnieres*, while his Lordship, taking up the deed that lay upon a table between the windows, felt it on the outside; then said, "Here is more than paper here, your Grace; may I break the seals?"

"Undoubtedly, my Lord."

The Earl instantly opened the parcel, and produced a small seal-skin case—"I am not mistaken in my conjectures," said the Earl,

"but now I must see what the case contains."

Old Chambers, who was standing on tip-toe behind Mrs. Studeville, exclaimed the moment the case was opened, "Zounds!"

The Earl turned his head, and the draper retreated, while the Duke took a ring, which had occasioned his exclamation, out of the case the Earl still held—one single diamond, of the first water, the largest, his Lordship declared, he had ever seen. The draper's rage almost equalled the surprise he felt at the first moment, as he now began to find what a gainer he might have been, had he been more charitably inclined when Mr. Studeville paid his first visit. Every one else had something to say in praise of the present, which looked to infinite advantage upon the Duke's little finger, as his Grace had a remarkably handsome hand.

The Earl, who was seriously hurt at the ridiculous gift his niece had forced upon his grandson over night, wished to convince her of her folly; therefore turning to the Duke,
who

who was replacing his ring, and not perceiving he wore any watch, said, "Pray what has your Grace done with your warming-pan, Sir Yelverton's watch I mean? I presume you found it too fatiguing: that is not the same waistcoat you wore last night; the pockets are not big enough, I suppose, or by way of variety, you wear it in your coat pocket to-day."

The Duke merely smiled, and the poor old lady was more disconcerted than ever. She had evidently deprived his Grace of a very valuable watch, in exchange for which she had given him one he could not wear, therefore must oblige him to purchase another; while her natural brother had displayed his taste, delicacy, and liberality, in the presents he had made the Duke and his children, though his fortune must be trifling when compared to her own. These mortifying reflections were not calculated to raise her spirits; at last however she was able to say—

K 6

"Mr.

“Mr. Studeville seemed to possess a very noble spirit; it was a pity his birth had not been more fortunate!”

The draper found it impossible to hold his tongue any longer—“Faith, Madam, I don’t know what you call being born fortunate; a man is not much to be pitied who can make such presents as those, let me tell you, and can drive his post chaise and four! A damned good luncheon, my Lord Duke, between breakfast and dinner: but it always was, and ever will be the case, those who want, shall want, and those who don’t, shall have abundance! An’t you of my opinion, James?”

Mr. Vernon prudently held his tongue; the Duke was amused at the envy the poor man displayed, but the Earl could not brook such familiarity; he gave the draper a look meant to terrify him from ever addressing such vulgar remarks again to the Duke di Ferrara, and Mrs. Studeville seconded him very ably;—she then desired Miss Vernon to distribute the money left upon the table. Unfortunately Mr. Robert got a bad shilling,

ling, and protested the one he had given was a very good one. The Duke and Earl both burst out laughing at the dispute which ensued between the family party: Miss Vernon tried to put an end to it, by saying, it was very likely her's, but Mrs. Studeville recollected her niece had put down the half-crown piece, and desired the shilling might be given to her: James immediately put in his claim for it, saying, "A shilling more or less was not an object."

"I believe it is at least of as much consequence to you, Mr. Vernon, as it can be to me," said the old lady; and insisted upon her claim.

Robert was obliged to submit, adding, "I dare say the old fellow put it in on purpose to set us a quarrelling."

This clever decision excited even the old Peer's mirth, but as the Duke's carriage had been in waiting some time, his Grace, the Earl, and Alfred, set out for Neville House. Mrs. Studeville retired into her dressing-room,

room; Miss Vernon did the same; and the rest of the party took a stroll upon the downs.

CHAP. IX.

MR. CHAMBERS had many remarks to make upon their morning visiter, and did not forget to call down a few blessings upon Sir Yelverton's head, for remembering a bastard son in preference to his own daughters, begotten in wedlock, and whose mother had brought the Baronet a princely fortune. Robert was only sorry they had not been more charitable; and James, who was of their party,

party, thought Mr. Studeville had shewn a very suspicious temper by the disguise he had assumed; but all willing, (though it was no longer of any consequence), to excuse themselves, and to lay the blame upon Mrs. Studeville's prudish notions: the draper repeated his remark, that she was a mere weather-cock.

They were upon their return when one of the Duke's grooms, who had attended his master, came galloping past them.

"Hollo! my lad," said the draper, "where's the Duke?"

The man pulled up, and said, "I left his Grace at Neville House, Sir, where I believe he dines, as he has sent me with a note to Mrs. Studeville."

The servant pursued his pace, and as soon as he was out of hearing, "By God!" said the draper, "that proud old Peer won't return, you find! I see through his manœuvres; he wants to bring about a quarrel between us and the old cat; he will tell her he did not chuse to keep us company. I foresee what
her

her answer will be ; so mind we are off to-morrow morning, or we shall be desired to tramp. I will defeat the old fellow's kind intentions : 'Madam,' says I, when we are going to set down to dinner, 'I am very sorry to tell you this will be the last dinner we shall be able to eat with you for some time.' You will all agree that we have staid longer than we at first intended, and as more company has arrived, she won't miss our society ; we must not pretend to guess *my uncle's* reasons for not coming home ; that would spoil all."

This wise plan being settled, James said, "that it might not seem preconcerted, he would defer his departure for a few days."

"Do, boy," said the draper, "and let us hear how matters go on after we are gone ; you an't a citizen, so my Lord mayn't mind you."

James readily promised, without having the slightest intention of keeping his word, being as anxious to overreach and dupe the draper,

draper, as that worthy man was to return him the compliment.

Mrs. Studeville was pacing her dressing-room, having thrown up the sashes for air, when Mrs. Wilson knocked at her door with the note ;—it was from the Duke, just to inform her, “ the Earl and himself had been so much pressed to dine at Neville House, they had not been able to withstand the Viscount’s entreaties; she must therefore not expect them before evening.” Though this note was worded in the politest manner, it nearly fell from her hands before she had finished reading it; she sighed to herself when she concluded, and was now convinced if she kept the Chambers family longer in the house, both the Duke and Earl would leave the Court. Undecided how to act, though determined to get rid of these disagreeable intruders, she told Wilson she should dress immediately, but first sent her down with some orders to the cook. She found she should not be easy till she had told the draper, his vulgarity had deprived her of the Duke and Earl’s

Earl's company, therefore thought to go down for that purpose as soon as she was dressed. Upon second thoughts she determined to let him have his dinner first, and then to give him so broad a hint respecting his departure, that if he did not take it, she should think herself authorised to desire him to leave her house.

Wilson soon began her task, and as she had been very anxious to relate all that had passed during the first visit Mr. Studeville had paid the Court, the old lady was in hopes she would be equally communicative as to the second. But the ancient Abigail dared not enter upon so delicate a subject without some encouragement, though she was to the full as fond of talking as her mistress was of listening, and usually entertained her, while she was dressing, with the various little scandalous anecdotes she picked up concerning their neighbours.

Mrs. Studeville having asked a few general questions, said, "I suppose you heard who has been here this morning, Wilson?"

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"To be sure, Madam, all the house has been up in arms, (as a body may say); and I may say, for one, I was never so surprised in my born days!"

"And pray what has been said?"

"Bless me, Madam, I hardly know; we were so beside ourselves to think you should have a brother, and not know it! But we all said he was a gentleman when he came a begging; and, as we all say now, it was for very wise and good purposes no doubt: but we could not get a word out of his servants, nor they would not touch a drop of ale, nor even wine, (for Geoffry offered them both), if it had been to save their souls;—they only said, Mr. Studeville was one of the best masters in the world, and so beloved nothing could be like it!"

"Did you inquire where Mr. Studeville lived?"

"To be sure, Madam, we did; but they were too sly for us; they only said it was a long way off, and if ever we came within ten miles of their master's house, we should soon find it

it out, for his name was never mentioned without a blessing being tacked to it: and I dare swear they said no more than the truth; for some folks have been fine gainers by his coming to the Court."

"Why who told you Mr. Studeville made his Grace a present I should like to know?"

"Nobody never told me no such a thing, Madam; but I am sure his Grace's valet got a very fine one! he may wish you found a brother every day, Madam: I only wish I had been as wise when the good gentleman came last as I am now; and so does more folks besides. If we had but have made a subscription in the steward's room, we might have made a fine penny of it! but we were afraid of affronting you, Madam, or we should have given a trifle; only as you gave so little, we hardly knew what to do."

"Pray what does all this mean?" said the old lady very pettishly.

"Why, Madam, while the gentleman, your brother, if so he be, though you know
that

that matter best; to be sure he bears your name, but there may be more of the same name, if that was all,—it is only a great pity Mr. Studeville, if he is your brother, Madam, has not got a larger fortune, for he would spend it nobly, as his footman says; nay he is very rich, for the matter of that; nobody knows how much he is worth—but so good a man can't have too much!"

"You may as well say at once," said the old lady, hastily, "you wish he was master of Studeville Court."

Willson was convinced she had said more than she ought to have done, though she was by no means aware her words were liable to the construction her mistress had put upon them; the comb fell from her hand, and though her surprise was a good deal affected, it was some time before she either spoke or proceeded with her task. At last she exclaimed, "Lord, Lord, Madam, what was it I said made you think any body, much more me, who love you more than my own life, could be so wicked? I am sure I know no more

more what I was prating about than this comb in my hand (she had picked it up), or this cushion upon your head."

Mrs. Studeville, rather appeased, said, "I believe you often run on, as you say, Wilson, without knowing what you mean. But what was you going to say about the Duke's valet?"

"True, Madam, I was talking about him! Bless me, you sent all my brains a wool-gathering! Why, Madam, when Mr. Studeville went into the parlour, one of his footmen inquired for Mr. Nelson, and put a paper into his hand, telling him, 'My master desired I would give you that, Sir;' and, would you believe it, Madam, in return for the guinea Mr. Nelson gave the old gentleman, he sent him a twenty pounds note of the bank of England! That was returning tenfold, as Geoffry said; so you see, Madam, what we might all have got if we had subscribed. Mr. Nelson had already had five guineas from his generous master, as a reward for the charity he had displayed! these were the very words the Duke spoke when he

he gave him the money. Lord, Madam, what a pleasure it must be to serve such a man! Mr. Nelson may well say, he and all his fellow-servants would go through fire and water for his sake."

"I am happy they are sensible what a blessing it is to have so good a master," said the old lady, "and that Mr. Studeville was so generous; but make haste, 'tis time to go down stairs."

Wilson did as she was ordered, but continued her comments upon the Duke and Mr. Studeville till she was dismissed.

The old lady felt no inclination to join her guests, notwithstanding what she had said to her Abigail. She resumed her walk, not at all flattered to find her brother was, according to his servants' report, much more respected and beloved than herself; she also felt she had lowered herself very much in her uncle's eyes. The present she had made the Duke struck her as being both unworthy and unfit for his Grace;—she therefore wished more than ever to raise herself, if possible, once more in this favourite cousin's good opinion; his good-will was not to be bought, she

she was now convinced, by any thing she had to bestow, either upon himself or his children. But he seemed interested in the happiness of Mr. Neville; therefore if her niece could but captivate that gentleman, she was determined her generosity upon the occasion should far exceed what she had given the Duke to understand she meant to do for her niece, if she married with her approbation.

The sound of the last dinner-bell interrupted her meditations. She descended with slow solemn steps, and crossed the hall with the utmost deliberation, arranging various schemes to get rid of the company she expected to meet in the eating parlour; she had come to a resolution not to look pleased, and perfectly succeeded. By way of prelude to what they were to expect, she said, looking at Miss Vernon—

“Do you take this chair, niece; I shall have no other company to-day.”

The draper perfectly understood the look which accompanied this remark, and was almost afraid he should not be in time; therefore instantly began his preconcerted declaration.

ration. Mrs. Studeville's eyes brightened, as she was very happy to find she should not be obliged to order them to quit the Court, and when once they were without her doors, she had long since come to a resolution never to afford them another opportunity to torment her again. She made no attempts, it may be supposed, to induce them to prolong their stay; merely said she hoped they would have a pleasant journey home, with a few more formal phrases, customary upon such occasions, and condescended, as it was to be the last, to spend the afternoon with them.

Soon after eight the Duke, Earl, and Alfred, returned. His Lordship had also been forming a plan to rid the old lady of her City visitors, which he hastened to communicate as soon as the Duke and he had taken their seats, and answered the few general inquiries Mrs. Studeville, who was ever the slave of etiquette, thought it necessary to make.

"Niece, I have a proposal to make to you, and if it meets your approbation, why, I will

spend a fortnight with you at the Court, by way of replacing the Duke, who returns to Neville-House to-morrow, but who will visit us every day if you are inclined to comply with our joint wishes; else I shall accept the invitation Lord Fortrose gave me in town, and take up my quarters also with him. But the Viscount and his son have agreed to accompany the Duke and me to town for the birth-day, and if you will be of the party, you have heard my conditions. You have not been in London these twenty years; the jaunt and change of air will be of service to you, and as you have not been very well lately, you will there have an opportunity of having the first advice. The season is very favourable for travelling; at Melton House you will be as much at home as you are here; Lady Gowrie and Susan will be particularly happy to see you, and such a journey will afford you a fund of conversation for the ensuing winter. I shall not press for your decision to-night, but I expect it to be favourable if you wish me to continue your guest."

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The draper, who thought his entreaties must be of great weight, began to urge Mrs. Studeville very earnestly to agree to his Lordship's proposal, and all his family tried to express the pleasure they should feel in seeing her in London—

"For we are obliged to quit the Court to-morrow, my Lord," said the draper, looking at the Earl; "I am sorry we had it not in our power to give Mrs. Studeville a little longer notice of our intentions; but business must be minded, your Lordship knows."

The Earl was perfectly satisfied, and said, with an ironical smile, "I am afraid my niece will find the Court very dull after your departure, Sir; that may induce her to favour me with her company in town."

The draper bowed, and Mrs. Studeville said, she would do any thing to oblige either her uncle or the Duke; was very sorry the latter's engagements clashed so much with her wishes; she certainly had given up all thoughts of ever visiting London again, little expect-

ing such powerful temptations would be held forth to induce her to break through her resolution;—it had been her intention to try the air of Newnham Hall in the course of the summer, and if the Duke and her uncle would do her the honour to spend a week or ten days with her there after the birth-day, she would joyfully accompany them to town. His Grace and the Earl promised to oblige her; the Chambers party affected to be overjoyed, and thus rested matters for the night.

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CHAP. X.

THE draper and his family were allowed, as they had been the preceding day, to breakfast *en famille*, notwithstanding their approaching departure; this gave the old man very little concern, he observed, as, if it was not for what she had to leave behind her, he should never seek the formal old cat's company.

As soon as they had finished their breakfast, Robert sat out for Bristol, to secure a conveyance to London. They had come down in two post-chaises, "but had not been sufficient gainers by their visit," the old man

said, "to return in the same style." There were several coaches left Bristol a quarter before two o'clock, and reached London by nine the next morning, and if they could get one of those to themselves, it would be very comfortable; because, by taking a hearty snap before they set off, they should not want much upon the road, and should be in Birchington Lane time enough to get some hot rolls. If Robert succeeded to his wish, (and he was to take places in two stages rather than be disappointed), he was to return in a hackney coach, that would convey them and their baggage to Bristol. Fortunately it appeared to Mrs. Studeville nothing intervened to retard their departure, and by twelve o'clock Robert, in his hack, drove into the back yard.

The Duke and Earl having learnt from Miss Vernon what time they meant to set off, and how they meant to perform their journey, took an early walk tête-à-tête, not wishing to be present at their adieus. His Grace, at the old lady's request, had sent over to

Neville

Neville House, to intreat his friend would dine at the Court, promising to return home with him in the evening. Mrs. Studeville came down as soon as she was informed there was a hackney coach in waiting, convinced they were now going in good earnest. From that time till one the draper spent in getting what he called *a good inside lining*, advising his family to do the same, as they would not meet with any thing half so good upon the road. At last, having overwhelmed the old lady with their thanks, and made her renew the promise she had made to visit them in Birchin-Lane if she did come to London, she had the inexpressible satisfaction of seeing them drive from the door. James accompanied them to Bristol, and was to return to dinner.

"Heaven be praised," said the old lady, "they are gone at last, child," addressing Miss Vernon, upon whose arm she was leaning, for she did take leave of them at the hall-door.

Miss Vernon hoped no accident would befall them between the Court and Bristol, and, at her aunt's request, accompanied her into her dressing-room; who then asked her very seriously, if she thought it would be prudent in her to venture to accompany the Duke and Earl to London: acknowledging she wished to be of the party, but was fearful such a journey would prove too fatiguing. Miss Vernon overruled all the scruples the old lady merely alledged in hopes she would endeavour to obviate them. This point settled to the satisfaction of both, the conversation reverted to their late guests.

"The draper and his son were unbearable!" the old lady affirmed; "her namesake was a silly, good-tempered girl, whose education had been very much neglected, yet might make a tolerable wife; and she understood she had an admirer who the draper thought would be a very suitable match. — I wish her happy, poor thing! she has something of my sister about her; is too easy, too simple:—Bridget was neither renowned
for

for her prudence, nor her parts; she paid dearly for her imprudence, poor girl!—Mrs. Chambers talked largely, and, like her daughter, she was vain, and fond of admiration. This is a disagreeable subject, my dear;—and as for Mrs. Robert Chambers, she is all but an idiot, and had no great fortune, the old man told me; yet I should have thought money alone would have got her a husband. However, they know best; I don't wish to interfere in their family concerns, nor indeed to see any more of them, if it could be helped!”

Miss Vernon neither chose to praise nor criticise. Little of moment occurred during the ensuing week. Mrs. Studeville's thoughts were now wholly turned upon her impending journey, and the great prospects she had in view for her niece.

The Duke and Mr. Neville were more at the Court than at Neville House; the latter improved very much upon acquaintance, in the old lady's opinion, and particularly as he paid Miss Vernon the most flattering attention. The Duke had taken an early opportunity

portunity to repeat to him, nearly word for word, what had passed between him and Mrs. Studeville, respecting himself and Miss Vernon, and, in consequence of this information, Neville had expressed his wishes to Lord Fortrose to pay his addresses in form to the young lady; mentioning what the Duke had told him concerning her aunt's favourable intentions. The Viscount thought her in every respect an eligible match for his son, and, at his request, waited upon Mrs. Studeville, and in very polite terms expressed a wish to be allied to her by the marriage of his son and Miss Vernon: she readily agreed to the proposal, promising, unasked, to make a very considerable addition to her niece's fortune, and also hinting that Mr. Neville might expect to come in for a large share of her property at her death. The Viscount was very much pleased, and Mr. Neville was next day introduced to her niece, by the old lady, who had previously consulted Grace's sentiments, and finding they perfectly coincided with her own, told her the conversation between her
and

and Lord Fortrose: the emotion of this amiable girl when she learned her aunt's generous intentions in her favour, raised her in that lady's estimation more than the most studied expressions of gratitude could have done.

During the following week Mrs. Studeville launched her new coach, which was really very handsome, only hung rather too high she apprehended, and the arms were hardly sufficiently conspicuous; but as it was built quite in the style of fashion, she hoped in time to get accustomed to it. The ensuing Saturday was the day fixed for her departure from the Court. As the Duke and Earl had each only a post-chaise in the country, it was agreed they should travel with Mrs. Studeville and her niece in her carriage; and that Lord Fortrose and Mr. Neville should follow them the next day: the young Marquis, who the Duke thought would be, in many respects, happier in the country than in town, and that at all events it would be much more conducive to his health, was to remain with Mrs. Neville till Mrs. Studeville's

ville's return, when he was to cross the country with that lady to Newnham-hall, where the Duke and Earl were to join him before they proceeded to Melton Abbey. As his Grace did not propose spending more than a fortnight in London, Alfred was easily reconciled to so short a separation. He had several times seen the fair stranger since the Duke and Neville had made their unsuccessful attempt; but, from the child's account, whom his Grace questioned with infinitely more curiosity than he had done at first, she always seemed afraid of being observed, never appeared without a veil, and seldom stopped any time with him. Her behaviour puzzled the Duke excessively, and led him into a train of reflections upon past events. Lord Melton generally accompanied him and Mr. Neville during their morning airings, which prevented the two latter from devising any scheme to satisfy their desire; but the Duke often brought up the subject when he and Neville were tête-a-tête, and sometimes seemed so anxious to discover who this unknown fair-one was, that

that Neville was half tempted to rally him, and once ventured to ask the Duke, "whether he had any reason to suppose she was an Italian?"

"Not the slightest," was the answer.

A half-suppressed sigh as he ceased speaking, rather astonished the gay Neville, and induced him to drop the subject; for it might have been truly said, his father, mistress, and friend shared his heart among them, and that his attachment for the Duke increased with their intimacy.

Mr. Vernon left the Court a few days after the draper and his family: when the old lady bade him adieu, she presented him with the two notes her brother had returned, and, in a blank cover, he also received two other notes, of a hundred pounds each, with which he was so well satisfied, he made no attempt to discover the person to whom he was thus obliged; nor did he mention the present to either his aunt or sister, but in high spirits went to resume his studies at Oxford.

At the appointed time the Duke, Earl, Mrs. Studeville, and Miss Vernon set out for the metropolis; Mrs. Wilson and Miss Vernon's maid travelled in the Duke's post-chaise; Nelson and the Earl's valet in his Lordship's. Mrs. Studeville's two grey-headed footmen were to follow in one of the stages, as three out-riders belonging to the Duke, and one to the Earl, formed a sufficient guard, she thought, to protect her in case of danger. The cavalcade slept at Reading the first night, and as they were expected to dine in London on the Sunday, Mrs. Studeville would have scorned to complain of fatigue, though she sometimes remarked the post-boys were very rash; her new watch, which she could only compare to the sun, in point of exactness, enabled her to inform her companions, within a few seconds, how long they were going each stage. Between three and four o'clock they reached Melton-House. The Earl had written Lady Gowrie word whom she might expect, and as her Ladyship knew her father-in-law wished to shew the

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the utmost respect to the Duke di Ferrara, she took care, as far as lay in her power, to second his Lordship's intentions.

Lord Gowrie and Captain Mellifont were on the steps to receive their grandfather and his guests: Mellifont's looks denoted the satisfaction he felt; the Viscount had recourse to compliments to express his joy; Lady Gowrie and her daughter gave the whole party a most cordial welcome. The Duke was the particular favourite of both, and they were excessively happy he had consented to become their inmate. Mrs. Studeville did not stand very high in her Ladyship's favour: however, she rather pitied than blamed her failings, and ever, when they had met, treated her with the utmost politeness.

As soon as the first compliments were over, the old lady began to admire the elegance of the apartments, which had been newly furnished, and were in other respects very much improved since her last journey to London. She only wished religion and virtue kept pace with taste and luxury.

"No bad wish, niece," said the Earl, "though the two former are not totally incompatible with the latter."

A dissertation ensued between his Lordship and the old lady; while the Captain and Miss St. Aubyn, who had been upon the most familiar footing with the Duke during his former stay in London, had drawn off his Grace to one of the windows, and were, with that cordiality, the band of mutual friendship, expressing their joy at his return, and questioning him about the old lady, with whom they were neither of them very intimate. Lady Gowrie was addressing Miss Vernon, whom she had long been acquainted with by report, and whom she found truly deserving of all the praises the Earl had bestowed upon her. The Viscount therefore found himself entirely overlooked; his grandfather had effectually damped all his pretended joy upon his arrival, by the chilling reserve with which he had treated him; the Duke had addressed him politely, but with no marks of friendship; and his figure and manners were not
calculated

calculated to impress either Mrs. Studeville or her niece greatly in his favour:—he therefore preserved a gloomy silence till dinner was announced, during which, according to his established rule, he endeavoured to drown every disagreeable reflection.

Mrs. Studeville thought the Earl was rather too gay for a Sunday evening, though of course she made no remarks; nor did she reflect the Duke was a Catholic, and, of course, accustomed to look upon the sabbath as a day set apart for mirth as well as devotion: the old lady was, therefore, not sorry when Lady Gowrie proposed retiring. The gentlemen sat some time over the bottle, and were in excellent spirits when they joined the ladies.

Tea being over, as Lady Gowrie dared not venture to propose cards, and the Earl did not wish to shock his niece, he intreated the girls, as he called Miss St. Aubyn and Miss Vernon, to enliven them with a little music. There was a very elegant piano-forte in the room. Lady Gowrie politely said, ad-
dressing

addressing Mrs. Studeville, "You have no objection, Madam?"

"None in the least, my Lady," replied the spinster; "I am particularly fond of sacred music. Grace is a very good performer; and I was looked upon as a very capital one when I was young."

The Earl turned his head to conceal a smile, recollecting the poor old lady used to thrum the Coronation Anthem and a few old ballads, upon a miserable spinnet in days of yore; but not chusing to express the contempt he had ever felt for her musical talents, merely said, "Then you shall give us your opinion of Susan's performance, niece: you, Duke, I know, are a connoisseur, and a performer, Lord Fortrose informs me."

"Quite out of practice at present, my Lord," replied the Duke, smiling, "therefore should indubitably disgrace my nation and tutor, the celebrated —; when your Lordship favours me with your company at Naples, I will give you a specimen of my talents."

Miss

Miss

Miss St. Aubyn now took her seat at the instrument, and the old lady composed her countenance, and sat prepared to listen to some fine anthem, or the Easter hymn; when, after a most masterly prelude, that young lady began the famous song in Dryden's celebrated Ode,

"The prince unable to conceal his pain;" which she sung in a very superior style. Her voice was full and harmonious, and her taste and execution equally praise-worthy; but this was so contrary to Mrs. Studeville's notions of sacred music, at least what she thought suitable to a Sunday evening, that she had her doubts whether she should remain in the room; she looked at her niece, lifted up her eyes to heaven, as much as to say, What will this world come to!

The gentlemen were loud in their applause when Miss St. Aubyn concluded: the Duke, in particular, paid her some very flattering compliments, and said a great deal in praise of Handel's music, yet gave the preference to many Italian composers.

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The Earl said, "Susan would grow vain!" Then turning to Mrs. Studeville, (who, though she had not chose to disapprove what excited the plaudits of the rest of the company, was by no means inclined to express her approbation of such profane doings), said, "Why you don't seem to have enjoyed one of Handel's most famous compositions, niece?"

"Miss St. Aubyn is a very good musician, uncle; but I can't say that song struck me as being very sacred, nor exactly calculated for a Sunday night!"

"You astonish me, niece!" said the Peer, with a sort of suppressed laugh, "and his Grace seems equally surprised! Alexander's Feast is universally admired; and Handel's music is generally deemed sacred: but pray what are you objections to this celebrated air?"

"It may be very fine, uncle, and I have very likely discovered my ignorance, when I ventured to criticise it; but it strikes me as an

odd

odd jumble of words, and by no means either sublime or heavenly!"

The Earl laughed, which half affronted her. "Well, you really carry your religious scruples farther than any body I ever yet met with, niece. That piece of music is always performed during Lent, and you are the first person I ever heard object to it for a Sunday evening! however, if you will explain your dislike rather more fully, if your arguments convince me there is any thing improper in that song, I will never have it sung in my house again on the sabbath-day."

The Earl was, as has been remarked, in very high spirits, and troubled with none of those scruples, the mere result of narrow-minded bigotry. The Duke he knew must consider them as absurd: he had had many opportunities to observe his Grace, though acting strictly up to the faith he professed, was totally free from superstition or mistaken zeal; his Lordship felt therefore very much inclined to laugh the spinster out of prejudices which could not raise her in the esteem
of

of sensible people. The old lady, on her side, was very much piqued, and was more than half tempted to undertake to convert her ungodly uncle; but thought she should only be laughed at if she made the trial in the present company, whose depraved taste and morals she placed to the score of fashion: and in reply to the Earl's question, she answered, "I must beg to be excused disputing upon the subject, uncle: I seem singular in my opinion, and perceive religion changes with the fashions, like every thing else."

"That is a very profane notion, niece," said the Earl, "but with your leave we will wave theology. I really am of opinion you did not attend to the words you have condemned. They are certainly very expressive! Now only suppose me to be a very passionate lover!" beginning to repeat the song in the most ludicrous manner, and with great emphasis addressing himself to the old lady, who quite provoked, exclaimed, "No one will ever persuade me, my Lord, there is any beauty in a parcel of nonsensical words jumbled

bled together about a tipsy Prince! And as for 'Gazed on the fair, and sighed and looked,' repeated over and over a dozen times, it is gloriously absurd in my apprehension: and at last the fuddled wretch —"

The conclusion of these comments was totally drowned in a general, and, for some time, uninterrupted burst of laughter! The Duke flung himself upon the sofa, the Earl into an arm chair, holding his sides; and even Lord Gowrie's unamiable countenance relaxed from its usual gloom.

When the mirth rather abated, the Duke, who thought he should probably prove most successful, undertook to excuse the indecorum, protesting he had been the occasion of it; and affected to adopt the old lady's way of thinking, respecting the words that had shocked her purity, declaring her excellent remarks had excited his laughter at their absurdity!

Perfectly appeased, the spinster smiled, and told him, "She was happy she had contributed

buted so much to the entertainment of the company." But finding herself rather fatigued, she soon retired, having begged to be excused sitting down to supper. Miss Vernon accompanied her to the dressing-room, where she held forth for some time upon the wickedness of the present age; but, by way of excusing the Duke and the Earl, said, "they were obliged to conform to the reigning manners." Miss Vernon reminded her, his Grace was a Catholic; therefore would not have deemed it at all improper even to have danced of a Sunday evening after the duty of the day was over.

"True, Grace!—Bless me, I wish I had not said so much about religion, for he is undoubtedly a very good young man, and must have thought me quite a rigid puritan."

They then expatiated upon the rest of the family: neither of them liked Lord Gowrie, but were unanimous in their praises of the Viscountess, her daughter, and Captain Melifont; and after a few more animadversions upon

upon their journey, &c. Miss Vernon was allowed to return to the company in the drawing-room.

CHAP. XI.

IN compliment to the old lady, the Melton family breakfasted at her usual hour of nine; and their repast was scarcely concluded, before Mr. Chambers was announced to Mrs. Studeville. The draper was ordered to be shewn into another room by the Earl's desire, who was astonished the old fellow had

not made it rather earlier, or called over night.

Mrs. Studeville declared "he should not detain her many minutes; supposed he merely wished to convince her how impatient he was to welcome her to London; presumed she should be tormented to visit Birchin-Lane: she would make no rash promises, but her first visit, if she did go, should be her last!"

The Earl encouraged this declaration, and taking her niece's arm, she joined Mr. Chambers, who had no sooner expressed his joy to see her look so well, &c. than he said—

"I am come ambassador, my good Madam, from a young couple, who intreat, as the greatest favour you can confer upon them, you would fix their wedding-day, and honour their nuptials with your presence?"

The draper stopped, hoping he had occasioned a very agreeable surprise. Mrs. Studeville was rather at a loss, and intreated he would explain himself.

"Why,

"Why, Madam, you know I told you my daughter Rachel, your namesake, had got an admirer; and since our return to London, the young spark has been so anxious to bring matters to a conclusion, that Rachel has agreed to leave every thing to you, Madam; so pray don't let me return home, Madam, and dishearten my intended son-in-law, who is a very clever young fellow I can assure you, and has got the gift of the gab much better than I have, as I tell him. I am honest John Bull, and han't got so many fashionable phrases at my fingers' ends! I am sure if he was here to plead his own cause, you would not be able to deny him the favour he asks, Madam. I did not like to bring him with me, else I can assure you he is as much the gentleman as any one in the city of London, be the others who they may; keeps his chaise, groom, boy, and footman, I can assure you, Madam, and lives as well as the best of them! It will be an excellent match for my daughter; so, Madam, as she is your namesake, and it is her particular wish you should fix the

M 2

happy

happy day, I hope I shan't disappoint them when I go home; they are waiting my return impatiently enough, I will be sworn."

Mrs. Studeville was taken by surprise, and though she perfectly understood the meaning of the compliment Miss Chambers, by her father's account, wished to pay her, still she hardly knew how to put an absolute negative upon her request; but replied, "Indeed, Mr. Chambers, I am very sorry the decision of so important a day should be left to me. My stay in London will be very short, I can assure you; the young people have my best wishes, but I shall not have a day I can call my own; I may very possibly not spend more than a week in town, and perhaps not that, if I find the air does not agree with me."

"Bless you, my dear Madam, I shan't dare shew my face at home if I don't succeed to my poor girl's wishes; let it be to-morrow if it suits your convenience: Rachel will cry her eyes out if you don't dine with us at least on her wedding-day, and you know she can't make any objections after having agreed

to

to leave every thing to you ; and the young spark will jump for joy !”

Mrs. Studeville blushed at the draper's indelicacy, then said, “ Really, Sir, it will be very inconvenient to me, though I should wish to oblige the young people ; but I am not fond of a bustle, you know, Mr. Chambers.”

“ We shan't have any bustle, take my word for it, Madam, and will dine either in town or country, which you prefer. I have got as neat a little box as you shall wish to see, only a mile and a half off the stones ; just a pleasant drive to get you an appetite for your dinner, which shall be served at your own hour, and you need not drive five hundred yards upon the stones to jolt you, for my house is at Mile End. You can take the new road at Paddington, which is as smooth as this room floor, and where all the quality folks go to take the air : therefore, Madam, I can't take a denial ; though I can get you excused from going to church, if you don't wish to be present during the ceremony,

which would be thought a very great honour to be sure; but, as I shall tell them, they must not expect to have every thing their own way in this world."

Mrs. Studeville saw there was no alternative; she must either fix the day, or say she did not chuse to have any thing to do in the business: and as her stay was to be very short, and she had thought of calling upon them once, this visit would do for all; so told Mr. Chambers, if the young people could make the following Saturday convenient, she would, if her health permitted, dine with them at his villa; but Miss Chambers should hear from her before that time.

Joy sparkled in the draper's eyes at the finishing sentence, which led him to hope the old lady meant to be more generous than upon his son's wedding: he poured forth a torrent of thanks, expatiated very warmly upon her great condescension—"Next Saturday, I think you said, Madam?"

"Yes, Sir; by that day week I hope to be in the country again."

"An

"An excellent day for folks to marry on, I always think, Madam ; for the devil is in it if they repent before the week is out."

Mrs. Studeville turned her head away ; and the draper wished he could have recalled his jocular remark, as he termed it. He next intreated Miss Vernon might be of the party—a matter of course, when he had got her aunt's consent ; and then not to intrude upon Mrs. Studeville, he said, and to set Rachel's mind at ease, he wished her a good morning, and hurried away.

As soon as he was gone—"Was there ever any thing like this, Grace ? I am half angry for having suffered myself to be persuaded to go to this foolish wedding ; but what could I do ? I suppose the intended bridegroom is some vulgar being ; but if he expects to get an invitation to the Court, why he will be mistaken ! I must give the silly couple something ; the girl is my namesake, and not very unlike her mother—to the full as weak, and rather more ignorant ! I am not the dupe they wish to make me ; but do, my dear girl, think

think of some proper present for the occasion. I did not give the son any thing; I know they expected it, and that made me disappoint them: though had they behaved better at the Court, I believe I should have given the poor weak woman some trifle."

"Of what value would you wish your present to be, Madam?" said Grace.

"You know, my dear child, I don't like to look mean; I had thought of expending about a hundred pounds; that sum will purchase many valuable articles."

Miss Vernon made no remarks, though she had hoped her aunt would have advanced at least five times that sum. After a short pause, she observed, "that most part of the wedding clothes were already bought, so what think you, Madam, of a very fashionable set of tea china, with all the appendages in silver, such as urn, coffee, and tea-pot, &c. that will come to pretty near the sum you intend."

"A very elegant idea, niece; we will go out by and by, and look about us; the Earl shall recommend me to his tradesmen."

Determined

Determined to make her intentions public, Miss Vernon found, but did not chuse to remonstrate.

"The sooner the present went the better," the old lady observed; "and she should add a suit of lace, which would always be useful. Twenty or thirty pounds, more or less, was not an object!"

They now returned into the breakfast-room, where the purport of Mr. Chambers's visit was disclosed.

The Earl smiled:—"There won't be many more weddings in that family, niece; and as you have promised, why I think you ought to go. I commend your notion respecting the present, and if you add five thousand pounds to the bride's fortune, I dare say they would not take it amiss."

This the old lady affected to take as a joke, and the Earl suffered it to pass as such; though he seriously thought, as she had taken notice of the family, and Miss Chambers was her sister's daughter, it was no more,

considering her immense fortune, than she ought to have done. The carriage was soon ordered, and the Duke and Lady Gowrie accompanied the old lady and Miss Vernon into Cockspur-Street, where the purchases were soon made.

"I am something in young Chambers's debt," said the Duke, mentioning the money he had won of him at billiards; "I must send him some trifle if I see any thing I like, and you will suffer it to go, in your name, my dear cousin."

Lady Gowrie was pleased with his proposal. The old lady made a few remonstrances, though by no means averse to the credit of the present. Four very handsome silver salt-cellars, and a large cup, were purchased by the Duke, addressed to Mr. Robert Chambers, junior, and dispatched, with the other things, into Birchin-Lane. His Grace then took leave of the ladies, having several visits to pay. Lord Fortrose and his son dined, by special invitation, at Melton House; and were requested to repeat their visits, in the most pressing

pressing terms, by the Earl, whose only study was to make his house perfectly agreeable to his favourite grandson.

CHAP. XII.

GREAT anxiety prevailed in Birchin-Lane during the draper's absence. Miss Rachel's admirer, (the Mr. Cary, who her father told her, at the Court, would not have been flattered by the eulogiums she bestowed upon the Duke di Ferrara), had breakfasted with his intended bride, and was, or affected to be, overjoyed when the old man made his appearance.

Miss Rachel tried to blush, and said, "Lord! how soon, papa! I do declare I—"

"Not a word," said her father, interrupting her, "I promised in your name, (as your godfather and godmother did before me), to abide by the old virgin's decision, and I never forfeit my word you know: besides it might be many thousands out of your way one of these days! Ha! friend Cary, you know what is what."

"Good God! Saturday is the birth-day," said Mr. Cary.

"The devil it is," replied the draper; "aye, you are right, to-morrow is the last day of the month; faith a lucky thought of the old girl's! All the bells in London will jingle gratis. You won't forget the day I will warrant me: you don't want to go to Court, and the old spinster pitched upon it, I will be sworn, because all her quality relations are going to St. James's; and, egad! I don't think, *my uncle, the Earl*, would be fond of shewing her there!—She is a queer piece! that's the truth on't—but never you mind, Cary;

Cary; do you tip her some fine smooth speeches, and be sure you don't contradict her, that's all!"

"Did you see the Duke di Ferrara, papa?" said Miss Rachel.

"Not I, truly; I never asked after him. 'Tis that there foreigner I mentioned to you, Cary. Egad! I hardly know what to make of him; sometimes he can be as jovial and as merry as any of us, and at others he gets upon his high stilts, and a body must not so much as look at him: then, once, I thought he wanted to go snacks with us in what the old lady has got to leave behind her;—you take me, Cary? But, upon my soul, he seems to care no more about money than dirt!—altogether he is an odd mortal."

Here the discourse was interrupted by the appearance of two or three of the draper's most intimate friends, who were in the secret, and came to learn the success of his embassy. They were in the midst of their congratulations, as all the draper's acquaintance knew what vast expectations he had from Mrs.

Studeville,

Studeville, (and her condescending to honour his daughter's nuptials with her presence was a good sign they all agreed), when the purchases arrived; they excited universal admiration.

The draper capered about, hummed a tune, then shook Mr. Cary by the hand, saying, "I told you the old lady's namesake was her favourite! The spinster is close, but she is sure. Rachel will come in for the most at last, take my word for it. To be sure Grace Vernon don't want her money; and as for James, she knows he would soon put it into circulation; her hoards will never find their way into his pocket, except indeed she dies without a will, and then he must come in for his share:—nay, that I believe he must as it is; but her savings, and they are considerable to my certain knowledge, will fall to our share. Why, Bob, you look quite down in the mouth, boy!—let me tell you, that cup, and those salts, cost a pretty penny; and an't to be grinned at by those who have no teeth! You shall accompany Rachel to-morrow,

Mrs.

Mrs. Chambers, to thank the old girl; though you an't so great a favourite, you won't be forgot in the long run."

During the day Mr. Chambers composed some very proper compliments for both ladies, and gave them their full instructions, and by half past nine next morning they proceeded in a hackney coach to Melton-House; but, to their great disappointment, Mrs. Studeville was not at home. The truth was, she had, by the Earl's advice, given general orders to be denied to the Chambers family, as his Lordship assured her she would have no peace during her stay if they were admitted, every time they came, to trouble her either with invitations or thanks.

The four succeeding days soon slipped away: the Duke, Neville, and Mellifont, spent their evenings at some or other of the public places;—Mrs. Studeville and her niece accompanied Lady Gowrie and Miss St. Aubyn to the play, and on the Thursday to the Opera; but derived no great entertainment from the latter amusement, and only wondered

wondered how sensible people could sit to hear a parcel of foreigners make fools of themselves, and squall in a language so few people understood. The Duke undertook the cause of his country. Like most Italians, his Grace was passionately fond of music, and had listened almost with rapture to some of those singers Mrs. Studeville chose to criticise, and begged leave to remind her, the Italian language was generally spoken by the fashionable world. The Earl, with an expressive smile, advised her to drop the dispute; his Grace had much the best of the argument; but the Duke, who made many more allowances for Mrs. Studeville's age and contracted education than his Lordship ever did, agreed some of her remarks were very just.

Lord Gowrie was become the constant attendant of the old lady, and knowing what she had in her power, paid her every assiduous court. The Earl continued to treat him with the most frigid politeness, and as Mrs. Studeville piqued herself upon following his
Lordship's

Lordship's example, and perceived the Viscount was not a favourite with any of the family, she received his compliments as mere words of course; and could she have done it consistently with that respect she thought due to his rank, would have told him, as she had frequently done Mr. Chambers, not to torment her with his puerile remarks. The Earl, Lady Gowrie, Miss St. Aubyn, the Viscount, and Mellifont, had all determined to accompany the Duke to St. James's; Lord Fortrose and Neville had formed the same resolution. His Grace and Neville, whom he had introduced to his Excellency, were engaged to dine at the Neapolitan Ambassador's; the Earl and his other two grandsons at the Duke of —, who gave an annual grand dinner to all his friends on the birth-day; Lord Fortrose had agreed to dine at Melton-House with Lady Gowrie and her daughter.

CHAP.

CHAP. XIII.

BY nine o'clock on the Saturday morning the draper was at Melton-House, in hopes of seeing Mrs. Studeville before she breakfasted, but unfortunately that lady had not left her dressing-room; Mrs. Wilson was therefore deputed to receive him, and to learn his business. The draper was very much disappointed; however, learning from the loquacious Abigail, (whom he presented with a guinea, in his daughter's name, for a bridal favour), that Mrs. Studeville meant to dine with

with him, he was half consoled; but not chusing to trust what he had to say to the ancient maiden's memory, he intreated she would give him pen, ink, and paper, as he thought it would be more respectful to address her lady in writing. His recent generosity made Wilson all complaisance; she immediately procured him what he wanted, and he wrote as follows:—

“My dear and ever-honoured Madam,

“I took the liberty of coming down this morning, in hopes I should have caught you before you went out, presuming, now you are in London, you like to be abroad and amongst them; but as I had my walk for my pains, owing to your having taken a turn extraordinary in bed, I hope you will be all the better for it in the evening. So now, Madam, I will give you the heads of our plan, as I am in hopes, after you have breakfasted, and dressed, and so forth, you will do us the honour to join our party. I have insisted upon the tacking business being put off till half past eleven, upon your account;
so

so if you, and my niece Grace, can meet the bride and bridegroom, and the rest of us, at — Church at that time, why, Madam, you will confer an everlasting obligation upon me and mine: but as I have a thousand things to do, I must entreat, Madam, you will believe me, now and ever,

“Your much-obliged, and

“Most obedient humble servant,

“R. CHAMBERS.”

“N. B. My villa, where we are to dine, is just a mile and a half from Whitechapel Church, on the right-hand; but every body knows my house. So, once more, honoured Madam, I conclude. — I would not mind stretching a quarter of an hour, or bribing to have the clock put back a bit, if I was but sure you would come. Dinner will be upon table at three o'clock precisely.”

Having sealed and delivered his billet, the draper hurried away. He had been so long composing this, as he thought, truly masterly epistle, that Mrs. Studeville had grown very impatient

impatient before Wilson returned; and began to scold her for making her wait so long.

The damsel excused herself, "La, Madam, I am sure I did not mean to put you out of temper; Mr. Chambers assured me he should have said his say in three minutes."

"Vulgar illiterate beings!" said the old lady, very scornfully, "I can't think why I promised to go at all! — I wish the day was over!"

Fearful she made the breakfast wait, she hastened down, with the draper's letter in her hand, which the Earl, to whom she presented it, read aloud for the benefit of the company; and complimented his niece in his usual ironical way.

Soon after breakfast the family party separated for the day; the ladies went to their respective toilettes; the Duke, Earl, and Mellifont to take a walk before they began their's: Lord Gowrie had not attended breakfast—indeed he very seldom took it at Melton-House. Mrs. Studeville bestowed more pains to dazzle the vulgar Cits, as she always called

called them, than Lady Gowrie and her daughter did to appear to advantage in the drawing-room. Miss Vernon's dress was ever simple, elegant, and fashionable; and as soon as she had dismissed her maid, she joined Miss St. Aubyn, and acknowledged she was very sorry her aunt had fixed upon that day for her cousin's wedding, as she particularly wished to have seen the company go to Court. Miss St. Aubyn promised to bring her a very accurate account of every thing worthy notice at St. James's, and in a few minutes she was summoned to attend Mrs. Studeville, whose carriage was at the door; she had the use of a pair of the Earl's horses during her stay in town. About two o'clock they left Melton House, the old lady's two ancient domestics exalted behind the carriage, as she particularly wished to appear in style where she was going.

As soon as they drove from the door, the old lady hoped the Earl's coachman knew his way.

Miss

Miss Vernon said, "there could not be a doubt of that."

They took the new road, and Mrs. Studeville's attention was fully engrossed for some time in remarking the various improvements which had been made since she had visited the metropolis; but before they reached the great Whitechapel-road, her admiration of the surrounding objects was converted into fear:—"Why, child, for heaven's sake where is the man driving us? we look surrounded by a den of thieves!"

Miss Vernon agreed the prospect was not very brilliant, but had little doubt as to being in the right road.

"Well, I never saw so much filth and apparent wretchedness united," said the old lady; "there is certainly some strange mismanagement somewhere: I am afraid the rich in this great city only think of increasing their hoards."

Miss Vernon thought this rather a critique of the old lady upon herself, but assented

sented to her observation, till they turned into the high road again.

Mr. Chambers had frequently expatiated upon the elegance, size, and rural situation of his country box, while at the Court; had talked of his pleasure garden, shrubbery, piece of water, with various *et ceteras*! Miss Vernon, who had been twice in London during her late grandmother's life, had formed rather a high idea of his little retreat, knowing there were some pleasant houses in the environs of the metropolis; and Mrs. Studeville was of the same opinion, presuming a good garden was the first recommendation of a country-house.

They soon stopped at the door of this boasted villa, which stood in a row, much about the distance from London Mr. Chambers had mentioned. The house was three stories high, and had two windows in front: to the right lived a washer-woman, whose trade of mangling, clear-starching, &c. was painted in large letters upon a board over her door, and in the parlour window was a bill to inform

inform those it might concern, she had lodgings genteelly furnished to let for single gentlemen: to the left was a chandler's shop, the cellar underneath open, and adorned with green grocery, coals, wood, &c. and under the window hung a board, upon which was painted an afs and cub, the latter in the attitude of sucking, and underneath wrote, "Afs's milk sold here at six-pence a gill; the afs driven to the door if required. N. B. A cart and horse to let." Miss Vernon made all these discoveries while one of the servants was knocking at the door.

The old lady exclaimed aloud the moment the carriage stopped, "This can never be the house, Grace?" and her surprise was still visible upon her countenance when Mr. Chambers, followed by the bridegroom and Robert, presented himself at the coach-door, and began to express his joy.

He then caught hold of Mr. Cary, and pulled him forward, "Come, you Sir, I know you expect all the honours should fall to your share to-day. I should not have given up to

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any one else; but bridegrooms, you know, Madam, look upon themselves as privileged folks, as a body may say, for the day."

Mr. Cary, a tall, thin, but not ungraceful figure, and very well dressed, seemed rather ashamed of his father-in-law, but instantly presented his hand to Mrs. Studeville, whom he addressed with the utmost politeness; his language and manners astonished the old lady almost as much as the sight of the draper's seat! She smiled infinitely more graciously than she would have done upon either of the Mr. Chambers, and accepted the proffered hand.

"Go along, son Cary," said the old man, "go along; never mind Grace, I will give her my daddle, and you shall make your apologies when she comes in."

Mrs. Studeville just said, "Be so obliging, Mr. Chambers, as to tell my servants where they can put up the horses."

"Aye, aye, to be sure, Madam, let me alone for that; they will go into my stable; I have got an extraordinary good one, cost me —"

me —” But as Mrs. Studeville walked forward, the draper did not finish all he wished to say upon that subject, but began to bawl most lustily, “ Here, boy Jem, I say, boy, where are you, you lazy young rogue ; why don’t you stir your stumps ? don’t you know this is your young mistress’s wedding-day ? Here, shew these good people down stairs, and the coachman to the stable, where I hope he will find every thing he can want. Come, Grace, you and I shall lose all the best of it.” Then, in a lower voice, as they advanced up the passage, “ Has any thing happened to put the old girl out of humour this morning ? she looks as if she had got the cag.”

Miss Vernon assured him he was mistaken ; Mrs. Studeville was both in good humour and spirits.

“ I am glad of it,” said the old man, hurrying up a narrow staircase into the drawing-room, where she found Mrs. Studeville receiving the thanks and compliments of the bride, and Mrs. Chambers, for her late presents, and great condescension ; but was not

in time, to her great disappointment, to see how the spinster took the bridegroom's privilege ; the ladies and Robert were so eager to convince Mrs. Studeville of their gratitude, they either did, or affected not to perceive Miss Vernon was in the room, for two or three minutes, till Mr. Cary claimed the accustomed salute upon such occasions.

The first ceremonies being over, bridal favours were produced, and the bride begged to have the honour of pinning her dear aunt's on. The old lady allowed them to say and to do just what they chose ; but as soon as she was permitted to look round her, could not conceal her astonishment, as this, evidently the best room in the house, did not measure sixteen feet by twelve, and was eight feet high ; not badly furnished, and even crowded with chairs and tables, pictures, prints, ornamental china, &c. all good of their kind, but disposed without any taste or judgment.

She was hardly allowed to take possession of an arm chair, before the bride and bridegroom

groom stepped into the adjoining room, and returned with cake, wines, &c. which they presented to Mrs. Studeville, who said, "She had rather be excused, as she was afraid they would spoil her dinner."

"Then I say, Madam, don't mind their nonsense about eating bride-cake, drawing it through the ring, dreaming of sweethearts, and such like stuff; you and I, Madam, are too old to care about such things. Mayhap we were as foolish as they when we were young: but I would not have you spoil your stomach for all the bride-cakes in England. I hope to find the air of Mile End agree with you as well as that of Piccadilly."

"I bless God, Mr. Chambers, my appetite seldom fails me; but as Mr. and Mrs. Cary have taken so much trouble, I will venture to taste a small piece."

"Well, Madam, to be sure that is being almost too good, as a body may say; but you are all condescension, and I think a morsel may stay your stomach; I never find an oyster or two hurt me when I wish to make a

heartly dinner, or half a glass of brandy; but what suits some people would kill others—custom, Madam, is every thing. My friends always say they never find any air agree with them like that of Mile End! When they come to see me of a Sunday, they eat more sometimes than they do all the rest of the week besides! Shut up in the city, much good may it do them; as I say, I love to make them heartily welcome, and they are sure to find plenty of bub and grub here. But pray, Madam, how do you like our situation? an't it very rural and airy?"

"I have hardly had time yet, Sir," said Mrs. Studeville, "to look about me:" rather wishing the draper would drop the subject; but that he was by no means inclined to do, therefore continued—

"Do, Madam, take a turn, and look round you a little. Mrs. Cary, come girl, though it is your wedding-day, don't forget what is due to your honoured and generous aunt; shew her what there is to be seen. Here, Madam," placing himself at one of the windows,

windows, "don't you think a body may find pretty good diversion? Something or other is always passing backwards and forwards."

The old lady rose, "I should suppose you sometimes find the road rather dusty?"

"Not at all, Madam; we are seldom here in the busy part of the day, except on Sundays, and nothing disagreeable ever passes then. No carts, waggons, or droves of any kind; only handsome carriages, and smart folks, getting a mouthful of fresh air; and we Londoners are fond of sowing a little gape-feed! I keep this house for the benefit of our health, and, I may say, few people enjoy that blessing more than ourselves. Only observe there, Madam, that large pair of boarden gates; well, Madam, that is one of the finest cow-yards near the city of London! and a very great advantage every body allows!—Cow's breath is remarkably wholesome; besides we have their milk pure as it comes through the teat! Then, when the weather is fine, it is only a pleasant ride or walk into Birchin-Lane; so we enjoy both town and

country at once, as a body may say ; for what we can't get here, we bring out of the city, where, you know, every thing is to be purchased if one has but the needful : — and there, Madam, if you look a little higher up the road, there lives our small-beer brewer, who is a very good one as times go ; and as for porter, Madam, we can challenge all London ! You see that there public house ; it would not be a very easy matter to pass the door, you find, for carts and waggons, as I dare say the tap-room is chock full. Well, Madam, that there man, who only keeps *Calvert's Intire*, draws sixteen butts a month — that is what I call a good running trade ; so, Madam, if you are fond of sound, wholesome, humming liquor, why you will have a treat to-day. Then, Madam, if ever I find my stomach deranged after one of our great dinners, or so, why I send into the next door of a morning before I go to town, for a gill of ass's milk, which I have for six-pence, (some imposing rascals have the conscience to charge nine-pence), but that is sure to set me

me to rights at any time ; our neighbour is a very honest fellow ; our garden stuff we have cut fresh when we want it ; I have always the choice of the shop :—all my tradesfolks are willing enough to oblige me—a proof, you know, Madam, that I an't a very troublesome body, and pay for what I have."

The draper now paused, and Mrs. Studeville replied, "Your situation has certainly some very powerful recommendations, Mr. Chambers ; I no longer wonder at your attachment to this spot."

A sort of ironical smile was visible while the old lady was speaking, and Miss Vernon and Mr. Cary seemed both inclined to laugh ; but the bride, equally anxious to point out all the advantages of her father's country seat, intreated Mrs. Studeville and Miss Vernon would accompany her into the next room.

With some difficulty the old lady got round a handsome large four-post bedstead to the only window the room afforded, which overlooked the pleasure-ground, shrubbery, fruit garden,

garden, fish-ponds, &c. the old draper had so often mentioned at the Court. This boasted garden was exactly the width of the house, and about thirty yards in length; at the end stood the stable, that cost so much money; in the middle of this extensive piece of ground there appeared a small basin of dirty water, a little leaden figure upon a wooden pedestal—"Neptune in miniature!"

Mr. Chambers observed: at the farther end was a small grass-plat, rather brown than green, surrounded by a few stunted shrubs, dignified by the name of shrubbery; and nearer the house, a few geraniums and other flowers, set out upon a sort of gravel-walk, and a few currant-trees were nailed along each wall.

"This had not been a favourable spring for the fruit-trees," Mrs. Cary said, while Miss Vernon thought it would have been rather surprising, if those alluded to produced fruit in any season, confined as they were; though, at the Court, they had fre-

quently

quently talked of eating fruit-pies, and excellent desserts out of their country garden.

Mrs. Cary next pointed out their extensive prospect, and the fine air they enjoyed from Greenwich hills, while Mrs. Studeville said, "They had another advantage she had forgot to enumerate," (looking towards some brick-kilns within an hundred yards of the stable, then smoking, only fortunately the wind was favourable.

The draper was obliged to acknowledge "they were disagreeable now and then, but by keeping the window down they never felt the bad effects of them, besides, they were not always burning; and they were a trifling inconvenience compared to the many comforts they enjoyed."

Mrs. Studeville was now permitted to return into the drawing-room; the draper looked at his watch, "Zounds, our folks make it late! How goes time at Studeville Court, Madam? I dare say your watch has not varied five seconds since you left it."

The old lady told him, "it wanted ten minutes to three."

"Oh! I am glad to hear that," said the draper: "however, Madam, if our guests come, tis well; but if they make it a moment after their time, now you are here, we will fall to! I only asked two or three of my particular friends, warm ones though I can assure you." At that moment a stage coach stopped at the door: the old man, at the sight of the vehicle, exclaimed, "Here comes my neighbour Johnstone," leaving the room to receive his guest.

"Was there ever such a mean creature!" said the bride, as she bounced from the window, "to come in a stage, when he could keep his carriage and fix if he chose?"

No one took any notice of her remark; and in less than half a minute Mr. Chambers returned with a gentleman, not much unlike himself in point of figure, dressed in a full suit of light grey cloth, and who wore a bush wig, very much powdered. He gave the bride a wink as he was led towards Mrs.

Studeville

Studeville, to whom the draper chose to introduce him, before he suffered him to pay his compliments either to her or the bridegroom. The spinster rose to receive this important man, whom the draper thus introduced —

“Mr. Johnstone, Madam, my oldest and best friend in the city of London!—Neighbour Johnstone, my much-honoured relation, Mrs. Studeville, whose beautiful houses and fine parks I have often attempted to describe to you; and I have many times told you behind her back, I now do before her face, I have eat much finer fish out of her ponds at Newnham Hall, than ever graced your shop!”

The old lady hardly allowed the draper to conclude, before she resumed her seat, by no means wishing to have been introduced to any of the draper's acquaintance, and seriously offended when she found she was in company with a fishmonger! However, while this gentleman was wishing joy, &c. which took up some time, she resolved not to express her displeasure; determined
not

not to derange the harmony of the company upon such a day.

Robert, who was upon the look out, said, "Here comes the Deputy and his lady!"

Miss Vernon perceived a handsome four-wheel open chaise, drawn by a heavy black horse, pulling up to the door, and a lad, much like Mr. Chambers's footboy, getting down from behind. The draper had flown out of the room in such haste as implied these were people of still greater consequence than Mr. Johnstone. The bride approached, and told her aunt, in a low voice, "they were very rich folks; the gentleman was a rope-maker, had a very handsome house upon Epping Forest; they have but one daughter, who will have a prodigious fortune: and so she had need, as Mr. Cary says, for she is monstrous ugly."

The Deputy, whose name was Wilson, and his lady, were now ushered in very ceremoniously. The husband was a good looking jolly citizen; seemed fond of good eating and drinking; but was gay and facetious
in

in his way, and very good-tempered. His wife was a portly matron, tall, stout, and very red-faced; dressed in a very thick dark green silk gown and petticoat, and a white bonnet and cloak, because she had been to church with the bride and bridegroom. They were both introduced to Mrs. Studeville, who received them with cool civility.

As they had paid the usual compliments to the new-married couple, they soon got seated, and the Deputy said, "I began to be afraid, friend Chambers, we should make dinner wait; my wife is so fond of gossiping."

"Lord, my dear," said his better half, with a pleasant look, "men-folks like gossiping as well as we women do, for the matters of that. You must know, Mr. Chambers, I persuaded the Deputy to take a drive round, to get him an appetite for his dinner, as I told him, in order to pay a lying-in visit. You know Mrs. Jennings, of Aldermanbury, Mr. Chambers?"

"Yes, Madam," was the answer.

"Well,

“Well, it was her I wanted to see;—she has been very ill, almost at death’s door, as a body may say:—aye, it may be your case, one of these days; and your’s too, Mrs. Cary, though God forbid!—I suffered enough myself with my poor dear girl; my heart always bleeds for others, particularly when I fancy they can’t have all the advice and comforts they ought to have in such a situation; which I know must be the case here, where the fault lies God only knows, for I am sure I don’t!—Mrs. Jennings’s generosity, some folks say, has flung them strangely behind hand; and she, poor soul, took on, as well she might, to think she should bring a man a handsome fortune, and he not have judgment enough to take care of it!—It was enough to fret any body—I was at her wedding, as I may be at this. My Sally was two years, two months, and two days old! which was a very odd circumstance, we all said; and I shall remember it if I was to live these hundred years.”

“God

"God forbid," said the Deputy, interrupting, "for if you should, and your stories and visits lengthen in proportion as they have done for the last twenty years, the Lord have mercy upon those who are obliged to keep your company a hundred years hence!"

This clever remark of the Deputy's created almost a general laugh, in which the good lady who had occasioned it, joined, declaring, "Now you would be at some of your funny tricks, Mr. Deputy, but I will say I am glad I did pay a long visit to the poor afflicted soul, as she said she should have been dead if she had remained in town; so though they can't so well afford it, why she has got a bit of a lodging out the Shoreditch way. The poor creature had not any thing to offer me, worthy my acceptance, she said; but, as I told her, God knows I did not come for what I could get; I scorned such a mean notion! She was very generous when she had it in her power, and I shall always remember what people have been: I never turn my back upon any of my friends when they are low

low in the world ; for, as my poor dear mother used to say, ' A friend in need is a friend in deed ! ' "

" If you had not come away as you did," said the Deputy, " you might have told some tolerable long stories before I should have called for you. "

" Aye, aye, you would have wanted me at night," said the amiable feeling dame, " if you should get a drop too much in your head—who would take care of you then pray? A wife is a wife ; and a friend is a friend then:—Who do you think would have put your night-cap on, and tucked you up?—No, no, if you had not called for me to-night, you would have come early enough to-morrow morning I warrant me!—Aye, aye, Mr. Cary, you may laugh ; the honey-moon won't last three and twenty years—let me see, two—"

" Considering the number of times you have calculated that circumstance, my dear," interrupted the Deputy, " I wonder you should be at loss. "

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"There now, this is always his ridiculous way, an't it, neighbour Chambers? — But don't think I am to be laughed out of—"

At that moment the footboy brought the pleasing intelligence that dinner was upon table.

"The Lord be praised!" said the Deputy. "We shall have a little peace now at all events."

Even Mrs. Studeville smiled, while the greater part of the company laughed. Mr. Cary, who said little, but always spoke to the purpose, advanced to offer his hand to Mrs. Studeville; the Deputy was rather at a loss what to do between the bride and Miss Vernon: had he consulted his inclination, he would certainly have offered his services to the latter; but, knowing himself to be the greatest, at least the richest man in the company, he thought he must hand the bride. The fishmonger cried, "I don't envy you, neighbour, if this young lady will do me the honour to put herself under my protection;

Mrs.

Mrs. Cary and I have known one another long enough."

"Why you have known her from the hour she was born," said the Deputy, "and friend Cary has undertaken to know her till the hour of her death, if she don't see him out."

A few more witticisms passed before the company reached the front parlour, where the dinner was set out; fortunately the season precluded the necessity of a fire, or some of the party would have been material sufferers from the heat, as this room, owing to the passage, was much less than the one above: a chimney-board having been put up, and chairs placed close to it, there was just room for the door to open when the guests were seated, but it was utterly impossible for the servants in waiting to get round the table—an inconvenience some of the company thought of no consequence. The bride seated Mrs. Studeville and Miss Vernon on her right, Mrs. Deputy and her sister-in-law, (who permitted her to do the honours upon this joyful occasion), on her left: the gentlemen

groomsmen arranged themselves as they chose, as, the master of the house said, it was not worth while, among old friends, to stand upon form and ceremony, when a good dinner wanted eating. Not only the room, but the table, was crowded: the bride and bridegroom had each a servant in livery, besides the two belonging to Mrs. Studeville, and the Deputy's and Mr. Chamber's boy.

Every thing in season smoked upon the board; the fish was excellent, every one said, and reflected the greatest honour upon the fishmonger.

"Yes, yes, my neighbour always gives us the best, I will say that for him," said the draper; "put him upon his honour, and he is your man! but zounds! he flogs us for it."

"Sometimes," said the Deputy.

This brought on a few witty speeches about fish, cables, broad cloth, and indigo. Mr. Cary was a dry-salter. Mrs. Studeville was rather shocked to find what company she associated with, as, like Sir Yelverton, she had ever held traders of every denomination

nation in the utmost contempt; but notwithstanding they talked a good deal, and Mrs. Deputy was seldom silent, they did great honour to the first course: the second was not at all inferior either in point of quality or quantity. The draper's great friends gave him infinite credit for his taste in setting out wedding dinners; Mrs. Studeville also testified her approbation. The old man, highly pleased, protested this was the happiest day he ever had, or ever wished to see.

"You see, my dear Madam," he went on, "we City folks know how to live."

"I always understood the City of London was famous for its treats, Sir," said the old lady.

"And for great eaters, you might have added, Madam," said Mr. Cary.

The remark was so apropos she could not forbear smiling, while the draper told the company, "The cook employed upon this grand occasion was the first from the London Tavern; that he had chose most of the dishes himself, not to be taken in; and he flattered

flattered himself his Majesty, God bless him, could not have dined better, nor did he wish he should than his friends, when he undertook to treat them!"

The wines were also very good, and if Mrs. Studeville would have honoured all the gentlemen as they would have wished, she must very soon have been tipsy; she even condescended to taste the famous porter out of the silver cup Robert owed to the Duke di Ferrara's generosity, which, as well as the salt-cellars, graced the table; and presuming Grace would mention the circumstance to Miss St. Aubyn, who would naturally repeat it to her beloved cousin, she told the young man to whom he owed his present; adding why it was made, and upon what conditions.

"His Grace is a noble fellow, by God!" said the draper; "let us all drink health and long life to him in a bumper?"

This was readily agreed to, and every one had something to say about his generosity;

at

at last the dessert was set on, which was rather a seasonable relief to most of the company, as the room was become intolerably warm; but the door which led into the back parlour was now thrown open, and that window which looked into the pleasure-ground.

As soon as this was done, and the servants were retiring, "Now, my good fellows," said the draper, "go down and enjoy yourselves; eat every thing you can find, if you are able, for I shan't dine here to-morrow: and if I did, it would not matter. But, as I said, be merry, have as much porter as you can drink—never mind what it costs; and when you are tired of that, why every man shall drink a bottle of good old port, if he chuses, to the bride and bridegroom's health. Zounds!

"This is my lady's wedding-day,

"And therefore we'll keep holiday."

Mrs. Studeville gave one of her servants a look he understood; she was not afraid of them, but had some fears for her neck, and wished

wished more than ever she had brought her own coachman to London, upon whose sobriety she could have depended. The gentlemen gave fine sentimental toasts at first, but had no sooner got a little mellow, as Mr. Chambers called it, than they began to have something clever to say. Mrs. Studeville had wished for some time the bride would have moved; but she enjoyed the gentlemen's *bon mots* too much to be in any haste to quit them, till the old lady rose upon a *double entendre* of Mr. Johnstone's.

The draper gave him a look, and as soon as they were left to themselves, said, "Now, my worthy friends, you know there an't a man in the City of London fonder of his bottle than myself, and if it was not for my old maiden sister-in-law, egad I would have a thorough fet-too with you; but if she discovers we are drunk, she will be off in a jiffy! Talking of that, I will tell you a damned good story about the old prude."

He then related what had passed at the Court soon after the Duke's arrival there,

with various remarks of his own, to the no small diversion of the Deputy and fishmonger, and they agreed not to set in till after supper. The bridegroom was more soberly inclined, and as he thought some thousands might depend upon the impression he made upon Mrs. Studeville during this first interview, was particularly careful not to give her room to suppose he ever sacrificed to Bacchus, which indeed was very seldom the case. They therefore soon joined the ladies, merely in high spirits, and the Deputy and fishmonger promised to keep a strict guard over their tongues, not to offend the spinster's delicacy, who was rather squeamish, they could not help thinking.

Mrs. Deputy, who had taken her seat near Mrs. Studeville, was in the middle of one of her best stories when they entered, relating some incident which had occurred when she was breeding Sally.

The Deputy, an honest good-meaning man, and who was perfectly conscious of his wife's failing, said, "You are in luck to-day,
my

my dear; that worthy lady has not heard so many of your stories as the rest of the company have done. I hope you won't tire her too much, as some of them are very long."

"This is always the Deputy's way, Madam," said the prating matron laughing, "but I never mind him: it is only diamond cut diamond between us; he never affronts me."

"More's the pity," said the Deputy.

Mrs. Studeville was of his opinion, though condescending enough to say, "Mrs. Wilson was very kind in trying to amuse her."

"I must entreat, Madam, you won't encourage her too much," said the Deputy.

The company affected to take these cautions in jest, though every one perceived the good man was in earnest. Never did any body take more pains than Mrs. Deputy did to get an invitation into Gloucestershire:—she had been in the country when young; nay, she thought she recollected having seen Studeville Court;—then entered upon a story about a three week's *tower* her father, mother,

ther, and self had taken to the Hot Wells. But the draper reminded her that story was too long, as it would take her three hours to travel that ground over again, though she was as perfect in that one as in any she told.

These well-timed interruptions amused the company infinitely more than Mrs. Deputy's travels would have done ; and Mrs. Studeville was determined she should never renew them upon her account. Tea and coffee were soon brought in, and the elegant present Mrs. Cary had received set out in form and order. Though all the company had seen it before, every one found fresh beauties to admire ; and the time passed on very tolerably till near dusk, when the old lady began to talk of returning home.

"My dear Madam," said the draper, "why I hope you don't mean what you say? Bless my soul, we have got a very agreeable surprise for you in reserve ; we intend to conclude the evening —"

At that moment Mr. Cary intreated Mrs. Studeville would honour his bride and him
3 with

with her company to supper, at their house in town. Mrs. Cary joined in her husband's entreaties; but the old lady said they must excuse her, as she had promised the Earl to sup at Melton-House.

"Why, my dear Madam," said the draper, "you won't have an idea what sort of a match your namesake has made, till you have seen her town house. I can assure you there an't many of our first City merchants have a better, nor more handsomely furnished; and as for her carriage—but you shall see it. Mayhap you did not think Rachel would one day roll in her coach? but I can assure you she does; and can afford it as well as some of the best of them! This is the first day. Mr. Cary never would keep any thing more than his whisky before, but he always said his wife should ride in her carriage! and he is a man of mettle take my word for it."

"All I have hitherto seen of Mr. Cary, Sir, leads me to believe he will make your daughter very happy, who, on her side, I trust will prove herself worthy of his choice. If

it is in my power, I will call upon Mrs. Cary before I leave town; I shall then have an opportunity of seeing her house, and renewing my wishes for her happiness."

"You will do us honour, Madam," answered the bridegroom; "I can only say, we should have esteemed it a particular favour could you have made it convenient to have accompanied us home this evening; it is very little out of your road to Melton-House, therefore perhaps you may be so obliging as to spend half an hour with us, if we are not fortunate enough to enjoy your company at supper; the carriages shall be ordered immediately; a few of my friends only will give us the meeting at my house."

This was as much as to say, he was not among his own friends where he was. Indeed the old lady had remarked he took very little notice of the fishmonger, though he seemed pleased and even intimate with the Deputy. She was undecided how to act; but before she could make any answer, Mr. Chambers, who was sitting close to one of the windows,
started

started up, calling out, "Zounds and blood, who have we got here? — Somebody lost their way!" But in three seconds after he had spoke, his little salt-box shook to the very foundation with the peal which was played upon the knocker.

"By God 'tis somebody coming here," he went on. "Why, Cary, who is this? I never saw this carriage before! — Why, it looks almost like the Duke de Farie's livery."

Without waiting for an answer, he made towards the door, while every body else crowded to the windows, but in his hurry overset a chair, fell at his length upon the carpet, and once more shook the whole house! Mrs. Deputy was close to him when he met with this accident; she was hurrying towards the window, but stopped to assist him to rise; and had just stooped down for that purpose, when the draper bolted upright in such haste, he fairly overset the loquacious lady, who screamed out, "Mercy upon me!"

The old man, hardly conscious of what he had done, rather tumbled than walked out of the room. The Deputy began to laugh heartily, which was very fortunate for the rest of the company, particularly the bride and Miss Vernon. The old gossip was soon restored to her feet by Mr. Robert Chambers, who also picked up the chair, and she joined heartily in the general mirth, declaring, "The draper was a great, heavy, clumsy monster!" but assured the company she was not at all hurt.

By this time Mr. Chambers had got down to the door; and Miss Vernon, who had taken his place at the window, was soon convinced he was right respecting the livery, and presently saw the Duke, followed by Mr. Neville, alight from one of the most elegant town coaches she had ever beheld, launched upon this occasion she readily presumed; though his Grace had never talked about a new carriage:—the gentlemen were both dressed as they had been in the drawing-room in the morning. She immediately told
Mrs.

Mrs. Studeville who was coming in, and the whole party began to put themselves in order to receive these consequential visitors. Mrs. Deputy, who was most in need of a peep in the glass, shoved the fishmonger on one side for that purpose, while he gave his wig such a hasty twitch, he made the powder fly; the bride whisked into the adjoining room for two or three seconds, but returned before the Duke got up stairs. Mr. Chambers, in imitation of Geoffry, when he announced any visitor at the Court, flung the door wide open, and retreated, saying, "Pray walk in, your Grace."

The City party seemed impressed with awe, not unmixed with astonishment, while they gazed in silent admiration at this elegant nobleman; who made a general bow as soon as he was within the room, and would then have advanced towards the bride, who was standing next to Mrs. Studeville, but found his progress impeded by the bows and courtesies which assailed him on all sides; and when he once more stepped forward, he was

again stopped by Mrs. Deputy, who had got exactly into the middle of the room, and having extended her stiff silk gown and petticoat as much as it would permit, waited till the Duke's eyes were full upon her, then fixing her's upon his handsome, and now (in spite of his endeavours to repress his inclination to laugh) smiling countenance, she drew her chin in till it touched her neck, and in that position sunk till she nearly reached the carpet, so profound was her obedience; and after remaining in this posture for five seconds, she lowered her eyes upon the carpet, and tottered upright again.

The Deputy, who easily perceived the excessive difficulty both the Duke and Mr. Neville had to keep their countenances, willing to afford them an opportunity to have their laugh out, as he always did when his wife made herself ridiculous, said, (before she had made way for the Duke to pass), "There was not such a courtesy as that at St. James's to-day, I will be sworn," beginning to laugh himself; the draper, and fishmonger, followed

lowed his example; the Duke merely smiled more expressively, and Neville looked everywhere but at Miss Vernon for the first minute or two, fearful he should be guilty of a breach of decorum, or that it should seem he had joined this party to laugh at them.

While the Duke and he were saluting the bride, and complimenting the bridegroom, who was introduced to them by his father-in-law, Mrs. Deputy, looking at her husband, said, "I was always allowed to ——"

"True, true, my dear," said he; "But your knees grow stiff as you grow old!"

The draper now intreated his noble guests to be seated; they made no objection. But it may be proper to account for their unexpected appearance at Mile End. The Earl had agreed to accompany the Duke in his carriage to St. James's; but when they came to the street-door, instead of the chariot he had hitherto driven, his Grace perceived the new coach already mentioned, and his coachman upon the box. The vehicle was one of the most elegant and expensive that had ever

been built in London, (state carriages excepted), and the horses a pair of beautiful long-tailed blacks, full manes and tails, not less worthy of admiration. It is needless to add, the whole was a present of the Earl's to his grandson, who informed his Grace, seven more horses, exactly matches to the pair he saw, were now in his stables, and equally intended for him; only hoped his equipage would meet with admiration when it appeared in the Corso at Naples.

From the Earl such a present was truly flattering, and the Duke accepted it as he would have done a similar one from his father, with gratitude, but without ceremony: and after the drawing-room, as had been agreed, his Grace and Neville proceeded to the Neapolitan Ambassador's. The Duke had previously settled he should not go to the ball in the evening; therefore, when their dinner-party broke up, his Grace proposed this jaunt to fetch Mrs. Studeville and Miss Vernon home, in preference to returning to Melton-House. Nothing could have

have been more consonant to Neville's wishes, though he would not have ventured to have made the same proposal. Their only fears during their drive were, that the old lady would have left the draper's; but they knew the direction, and thought, at all events, they should see the much-extolled villa, (which exactly answered Neville's expectations, he protested, when they stopped at the door), and be favoured with a sight of the blushing bride: and every thing turned out as they could have wished.

As soon as they were seated, the draper hoped his Grace and Mr. Neville would honour the bride and bridegroom so far as to drink their healths.

"Most certainly," the Duke said.

Such condescension, added to the present his Grace had made Robert, quite won the draper's warm heart, and the whole party seemed to think themselves included in the compliment the Duke meant to pay Mr. and Mrs. Cary.

Mrs.

Mrs. Studeville, when she understood he was coming in, had desired Mr. Robert not to take any notice of the discovery she had made during dinner: and he, by no means sorry to be saved the irksome task of making fine speeches to the great man, made her wishes known to his wife and father, who said, in a whisper, "The old cat might have been ashamed of herself for not following the young fellow's generous example."

His Grace, by way of an excuse for his visit, said, "Mr. Neville and himself thought Mrs. Studeville and Miss Vernon might not enjoy the thoughts of returning to Melton-House alone, if they made it late before they left Mile End."

The old lady looked round with a sort of triumph, while she thanked the Duke in the most chosen terms for this kind mark of his polite attention. Miss Vernon smiled at both gentlemen; and told Neville, during the evening, "much as she was inclined to give him credit for his gallant intention, she placed the Duke's and his visit to Mile End as much
to

to curiosity, (which, she agreed, was never more excusable), as to the great fears they entertained for her's or Mrs. Studeville's safety."

Mr. Chambers now told the Duke how anxious both the bride and bridegroom were to enjoy the company of their worthy relation a little longer, if she could not be prevailed upon to sup with them, adding, "Though I say it, my Lord Duke, my son Cary's house is as handsome a one as any private gentleman has got, either in this, or your end of the town: I wish your Grace would say a word in our favour."

Mr. Cary now said, "It is an honour I dare no longer covet, my dear Sir," looking at Mr. Chambers: then turning to the Duke, "I can neither presume to entreat your Grace would second my former entreaties, nor that you would honour my house with your presence; much as I should every way be gratified, I repress my wishes."

The Duke, though he knew and had often heard many British merchants were companions

nions for the first nobility in Europe, did not expect to find Mr. Chambers's son-in-law of that superior class; yet his manners were those of a gentleman; his address, though modest, by no means servile; and his appearance that of an elegant man of fashion, suitable to the day, and his rank in life. What could have induced him to connect himself so nearly with the draper's family, the Duke could not divine; presumed gold performed the miracle (in that case, the old fellow must be much richer than he had ever understood), or Mr. Cary was not in very opulent circumstances. However, in reply to the bridegroom's obligingly half-expressed invitation, his Grace, with that good-humour and affability which rendered him so universally beloved, said, "If Mr. Neville and myself shall not appear in the character of intruders, my dear Sir, we shall both be very happy to accompany Mrs. Studeville and Miss Vernon to your house, and you can prevail upon those ladies to comply with your request."

Mr.

Mr. Cary, who looked as he felt, highly flattered, and particularly gratified, thanked his Grace in the politest terms. "His house was, as he had already told Mrs. Studeville, very little out of her road; a few of his friends, who had insisted upon assisting him to celebrate so propitious an evening, were to meet the present company, and intended to dance for a few hours."

"Then if those ladies, to whom I must continue to refer you, Mr. Cary," said the Duke smiling, "for we are totally at their orders, have no objection to your agreeable proposal, I shall feel myself very much obliged to them for affording me an opportunity of seeing a private ball in England."

This was so kindly obviating every objection the old lady could have made, she hardly permitted Mr. Cary to renew his entreaties before she acknowledged, "her fear of returning alone at a late hour, had alone prevented her from complying at first."

It would be difficult to say which was the most flattered, the bride and bridegroom, or the
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the draper; who swore, in a whisper to Robert, "the Duke would do a damned deal of good to the old woman." He next hastened, assisted by Mr. Cary, to present wine and cake.

The Duke and Neville were both in very high spirits; they had made as free with the bottle after dinner as they ever did, and each drank standing to the new-married couple. Neville protested he should not relish his cake unless it was drawn through the ring. The Duke begged to have the origin of that ceremony explained, and their joint remarks greatly increased the general hilarity, and were of a nature to permit the ladies to join in the mirth; even Mrs. Studeville began to look animated, and seemed to enjoy herself! But as the carriages were ready, they once more talked of going. The Duke's coach was the first that drew up: "I must beg leave to follow the bride and bridegroom," said his Grace, presenting his hand to the former.

Mr.

Mr. Cary's carriage was therefore called up, and the Duke, who had fully concluded want of money alone induced the new-married man to part with his liberty in favour of Miss Chambers, was rather surprised when he saw a very handsome dark green high-varnished town-coach ready to receive the ignorant vulgar being, for such he still thought her; fine horses, a coachman, and two footmen, in plain but new liveries, were convincing proofs the master of this equipage had not made his fortune by marriage; for five thousand pounds was as much as the Duke could suppose the draper had given his daughter. However, he handed in his fair charge; her sister-in-law and brother followed, the bridegroom stepped in last, saying, "he hoped he should have the honour of meeting his Grace again in a quarter of an hour."

The draper undertook to direct the Duke's coachman, "so that he should come plump upon the door at once!" While thus employed, and he was rather prolix, the Duke
returned

returned up stairs, and, addressing Mrs. Studenville, "You will do me the favour to make use of my carriage, Madam ; your own can follow."

The old lady courtesied, and accepted the Duke's hand, saying to the draper, "Either you, or any of your friends, Mr. Chambers, may make use of my coach to Mr. Cary's."

This, as the Duke thought, ungracious offer, (though the old lady really meant to be civil), was very gratefully accepted. The draper presented his hand to Mrs. Deputy, (while Mr. Neville did the same to Miss Vernon), saying, "Come, neighbour, we shall all ride in style to day ; thanks to my honoured relation's condescension."

The Duke's carriage was come up, and all expressed their admiration of it.

"Faith, your Grace," cried the draper, "Mile End ha'nt been so honoured this many a day. I told my son Cary his new coach was quite flashy ; but your's cuts his out all to nothing. You will never want the moon with these four lamps! and I think
yellow

yellow looks a deal handsomer than a dark green."

"True, neighbour," said the Deputy, "and a purple silk lining and silver fringe look a devilish deal handsomer than the best broad cloth that ever came out of your warehouse!" Mrs. Deputy admired the hammer-cloth; and, in a whisper to the fishmonger, "If the very servants han't got hats, and feathers, and bag-wigs!"

During their observations, the Duke handed Mrs. Studeville into the much-admired equipage; Miss Vernon, Neville, and himself soon followed her in. They dashed from the door full speed. During their short ride the old lady and Miss Vernon gave his Grace and Neville a short account of their day's amusement; in return for which they mentioned the most brilliant beaux and belles they had seen at Court; and the Duke informed the old lady to whom he was indebted for the carriage in which they were riding. She said a vast deal in its praise, and as the horses were very spirited and equally lively, they soon began to rattle upon the stones.

"Where

"Where is Mr. Cary's house, Madam?" inquired the Duke.

Neither of the ladies could tell: Miss Vernon thought they wished to keep it a secret; she had accidentally, for want of knowing what to say, asked the bride, who merely replied, "In the City, cousin."

"It stands in some lane or court," said Neville, "and they are afraid of shocking you with the sound."

"Some curious place, I dare say," observed Mrs. Studeville, "though I must own, he is a very polite young man, considering what he is."

The Duke smiled rather superciliously at her inference: "He is in business I presume?"

"A dry-falter, I understand," said Miss Vernon.

Neville explained the articles he dealt in to his Grace, and joined in his commendation, protesting he could not conceive what such a man had seen in his bride to attract his notice.

They

They were now driving through some very narrow streets. "Bless me," said the old lady, "I hope your Grace don't mean to stop any time; I dare say we are nearly arrived?"

"Our stay will totally depend upon you, Madam."

While they were talking, the carriage dashed round the corner of the street, and presently stopped. Mr. Cary was upon the steps of a very handsome house, ready to receive his distinguished visitors.

"Finsbury-Square, by heavens!" said Neville.

"And a very handsome one it seems!" observed the Duke.

"It will be one of the most elegant in London when finished," said Neville.

The coach door was opened, the steps let down, and Mr. Cary handed out the old lady, conducted her up a very handsome carpeted stair-case into a most elegant drawing-room, illuminated and furnished in a very superior style. Mrs. Studeville looked round
with

with wonder and admiration!—The Duke, Miss Vernon, and Neville, were equally astonished ; every surrounding object announced the greatest opulence, and was disposed in the utmost taste.

The bridegroom enjoyed their evident surprise; and after the first compliments, and generally flattering remarks, the Duke made, Mr. Cary ventured to express a hope his Grace and Mrs. Studeville would add to the obligation they had already conferred upon Mrs. Cary and himself, by honouring them with their company at supper; adding, “Our ball will not be quite so splendid as the one at St. James’s; but I dare say it will be as gay as light hearts and heels can make it.”

This was so unaffectedly spoken, that the Duke turning to the old lady, said, “You must decide for us, my dear Madam. Miss Vernon’s countenance tells me she will have no objection to join the dance.”

“I certainly had no intention of spending my evening from home,” replied the old lady; “but I find it totally impossible to
put

put a negative upon so many polite entreaties."

The happy pair had hardly expressed their gratitude, and the Duke's carriage been dismissed, before the rest of the party arrived; the draper handed in Mrs. Wilson, and as soon as he learned his son Cary's success, he turned to the matron, "Egad, Madam Deputy, you and I will have a hop too!" beginning to cut capers.

"Lord, Mr. Chambers, how you talk! I have never danced since my Sally was eleven years old; I danced on her birth-day; that is now, let me see, four years."

"What already up to your ears in calculation, my dear?" said the Deputy, who entered at that moment.

"No, no, Mr. Deputy; but my neighbour Chambers insists upon my dancing with him. Now I am sure 'tis so long since I did such a thing, I have forgot how!"

"I think it is almost time you had," continued her husband.

VOL. II. P. 111. "Lord,

"Lord, my dear, what at my age?" Don't you know there is Mrs. Mabberly, the cheesemonger's wife, dances at every Mile End assembly, and she is ten years older than me?"

"Then all I can say is, she is a greater fool than yourself!" quoth the Deputy.

The Duke, who longed to see her exhibit, (convinced from her courtesy she was very much calculated to shine in a ball room), gave Neville a look, who affirmed, that in every other country but England, ladies never thought of leaving off dancing before sixty."

"There, my dear," said the matron, "did you hear that?—I was but forty-four the twenty-first of last month that ever was!"—

To stop her incessant prating, Mr. Cary opened the door of the adjoining drawing-room, where two or three and twenty very smart young people, of both sexes, were assembled, intreating his noble guests would walk in amongst them, while the room they were in was put in order for their ball—it only required the carpet to be took up for that purpose. In the most respectful general manner

manner, without any direct introduction, he gave his friends to understand who had done them the honour to join their party; and though many of them thought these great folks would put a restraint upon their mirth, they were all well bred.

Refreshments were immediately handed about, and in less than a quarter of an hour they were informed the other room was ready to receive them.

The clock had just struck nine—"Come, we have only two hours to skip about!" cried the draper.

The Duke had not absolutely said he would dance, but immediately rose and presented his hand to the bride. Mr. Cary led out Miss Vernon, and as Miss Chambers's greatest merit in his eyes was her being niece to Mrs. Studeville, he now sincerely wished he had seen the elegant *Grace* before he parted with his liberty in favour of her cousin. However he consoled himself with reflecting he should most likely not have been equally successful.

Neville, by mere chance, as (Miss Vernon excepted) it was a matter of absolute indifference to him with whom he danced, led out one of the most ordinary young ladies in the room, whom he happened to be sitting near, which occasioned a general smile. The Duke told his partner she must favour him with her instructions, as he was by no means an adept in English country dances. She readily promised, but soon found his Grace was by far the best dancer in the room. Three violins and a pipe and tabor now began a very lively tune to the dance the bride had called; and in less than a quarter of an hour the greatest gaiety prevailed.

The amusement was kept up with infinite spirit for about an hour, when refreshments of various kinds were handed about. Mr. Chambers seized this moment to say, "While you take your breath a little, good folks, my partner and I will amuse you with a trial of our skill. Give me your hand, Mrs. Deputy?"

"Lord

"Lord, Mr. Chambers, how can you tease me so?—But if I must, I must—I always like to make myself agreeable wherever I am!"

The draper certainly kept the promise he had made, as he perfectly succeeded in amusing the company. They began a minuet, which was so truly ludicrous, the musicians could not play for laughing, and their jargon created almost a general roar of mirth, which the Deputy was the first to promote.

His wife guessed, "he would be silly enough to try to put her out."

At last the draper, who was as much diverted as any body, said, "he believed they must give it up for a bad job!" and country dances were again resumed, and continued without intermission till the company were summoned to supper, at half past eleven.

Mrs. Studeville had been so well entertained, she had even forgot to look how time went. Tables were set out in two very large parlours below stairs, and every thing served in a style by no means inferior to the appear-

ance of the house ; the wines in particular were excellent ; and the master of the ceremonies did the honours with the utmost ease and politeness. As it was Sunday morning before supper was over, the young folks dared not propose another dance : however, no one talked of moving till the clock struck two, when the Duke's party set the example. The bride and bridegroom, in short, all the party, went to the door to see them set off ; and each upon their return into the house had something to say in praise of the agreeable foreigner. Mrs. Studeville declared, on her side, as soon as she drove from the door, she had been highly amused, and bestowed very great and just encomiums upon Mr. Cary, who, she was convinced, must be a man of considerable property ; indeed Mrs. Deputy, with whom she had conversed a good deal during the ball, had assured her he was supposed to be worth half a plum at least.

“ Then we can only attribute his marriage to love,” said the Duke, “ and the little god never was more blind than in the present instance !

stance! — It was certainly a random shot pierced poor Cary's heart, for his education has been very liberal, and his sentiments are much too refined for his bride's comprehension."

"He was brought up at Eton I understand," said the old lady, "and succeeded his father in business about two years ago, since which time, Mrs. Deputy told me, he had been looking out for a wife."

"Then let us hope, my dear Madam," said the Duke, "he has discovered many amiable qualities in his better half which have escaped our penetration; or that the wanton little god will continue to blind him with respect to her imperfections."

Their arrival at Melton-House put a stop to their conversation. The Earl had retired, guessing what detained his niece, and presuming the Duke supped where he dined.

CHAP. XIV.

DURING breakfast the following morning an explanation took place. The Duke di Ferrara could not act wrong, else the Earl would have thought his honouring Mr. Cary's ball with his presence, an excess of condescension! Owing to the late hour at which most of the family had retired, it was near eleven before breakfast was over; the Duke's carriage was in waiting, and he left the party the moment he had finished it. The Earl, who had something to say to his Grace, accompanied him into the hall; but soon returned

turned to the ladies. Neither the Viscount nor Mellifont had yet made their appearance. As soon as the Earl came in, Mrs. Studeville, ever rather curious, and always interested in what by no means concerned her, observed that "the Duke seemed in haste, yet this was not a day for business of any kind."

"His Grace is not a citizen, you know, niece; but I believe he is gone to church, as I heard the order given to drive to the Neapolitan Ambassador's; and this is not an hour he would have chosen to visit his Excellency, when his chaplain is most probably preparing to celebrate high mass."

That so young and gay a man should even reflect upon so sacred a duty, rather excited the old lady's wonder; and she even ventured to express her sentiments.

"You would be more astonished, niece, if I was to assure you the Duke is a most strict observer of his religious as well as moral duties! But as he is neither a bigot, an enthusiast, nor a hypocrite, he never makes either his devotion or serious reflections the

theme of his discourse. He is not ashamed of doing his duty, but makes no ostentatious parade of the homage he pays to his Creator!"

Mrs. Studeville could not help reflecting how often she went to church, merely because it was the custom, and a prevalent fashion in the country; though, she assured her uncle, "she had intended going that morning, but found it was too late, and that she had not stayed away from a place of worship two Sundays together hardly since her birth."

"Well, never mind, niece; I trust my amiable grandson will remember me in his prayers; for, believe me, no one reveres true, unaffected, genuine piety more than myself, though my practice may not always have accorded with my precepts;—*et ecce signum!* we are to have a concert to night. I have not hitherto given much into these Sunday amusements, though I think them perfectly innocent; but am really afraid the Duke would find it very stupid were I to invite some puritan to preach extempore upon the follies

follies of the age, or hire some Methodist psalm-fingers to entertain us. — His Grace is accustomed to spend his Sunday evenings either at an opera, a ball, or at Court, and I should particularly wish to preserve him from the demon *Ennui* during his stay in my house."

The old lady was quite of his Lordship's way of thinking; his excellent intentions sanctified the action, and she should join the company without any scruple; but expatiated once more upon having neglected what she thought an indispensable duty. Lord Gowrie came in during her lamentations, and having made his inquiries round, the old lady, happy to find she was at least not singular, told his Lordship he did not seem to have been more godly than herself that morning.

"Lord Gowrie thinks it all in good time for him to begin to pray!" said the Earl.

As this was uttered in a sarcastic tone, the Viscount swelled with indignation, while he

replied, "he seldom missed attending divine service in the country."

"I never knew you enter a church yet when you could any way avoid it," retorted his grandfather. And a sort of spar was for some time kept up between Lord Melton and the Viscount, till the latter, unable any longer to govern his temper, left the house, almost determined never to enter it again during his grandfather's lifetime, who now appeared to him to take every opportunity of lowering him in the eyes of all his friends and relations. He once more fervently wished both he and the Duke had remained at the bottom of the sea.

Mellifont, who entertained suspicions similar to those his Grace had acknowledged concerning the fire-works, often gave him such broad hints respecting that and the Dover affair, as made him at times half mad. "Had he been Earl of Melton, the Captain would not have dared to give his tongue such liberties, nor any of his other friends, who now presumed to rally him about his newly-found cousin,

cousin, who, they prognosticated, would be the heir. Yes, yes, he would be Earl of Melton, and not have a shilling to support his title." In vain he repeated the vow the Duke had made; they laughed at the idea, and asked him, whether he should think himself bound by such an engagement, merely entered into to oblige a capricious old man? Conscious he should not, in the Duke's place, think it at all more valid than they did, and finding his grandfather's aversion increased daily, he was half tempted to leave the kingdom till his decease, and to contest his will, should he make one in favour of the Duke; but this resolution was abandoned as soon as it was formed, nor did he even venture to absent himself from dinner on this Sunday, as a select party had been invited, and he had been included in the number, yet found it an impossibility for him to look cheerful.

By way of raising his spirits, he drank a bottle of wine as a whet, and made it so late before he reached Melton-House, that the company

company were already taking their seats at table. The Earl, seldom inclined to overlook any want of respect, soon convinced him he had taken a very wrong method to reinstate himself in his esteem. The Viscount's former gloomy reflections returned, and he, as usual, neither joined in the conversation, nor participated in the general gaiety. Some of the first performers in England had been engaged for the concert, and all Lord Melton's friends had been invited.

It was late before the company retired. Mrs. Studeville chose to seem pleased, and even went so far as to whisper Grace, that "she saw nothing absolutely to blame in such parties."

Lord Fortrose and Neville were the only people (the Viscount and Mellifont excepted) who had been invited to stay supper; but when they assembled in the eating-room, Lord Gowrie was missing: no one recollected his having wished them a good evening, though most of them observed him leaving the room when the company withdrew.

"Had

"Had he any other engagement, Mellifont?" said the Earl.

"None that I know of, my Lord," was the answer; "nor did I know he was gone."

No further inquiries were made, and between two and three Lord Fortrose and Mr. Neville took leave, and the family retired to rest. The Duke occupied a room upon the first floor, the most convenient and quiet in the whole house the one the Earl at other times always slept in himself. His Lordship had taken care not to let his Grace suppose he had turned him out of his bed, cautioning his servants not to take any notice of this change of apartments, to prevent the Duke's valet from letting his master into the secret.

The Earl himself now slept up two pair of stairs; and as soon as he entered his dressing-room, sat down to write a letter to a gentleman in office, then several miles in the country, which he meant to dispatch by one of his servants almost immediately, in hopes he would reach his friend's house by his hour of rising. As composing and writing
this

this epistle took up some time, it began to be day-light before he prepared for bed. The valet, as soon as he left him, was to dispatch his express.

His Lordship had just entered his bedroom, when he suddenly started, saying, "Good God! what was that?"

"I heard an odd noise, my Lord," said the servant, "something like the report of fire-arms!"

A second noise almost instantaneously succeeded the first.

"That," cried the Earl, "is the rattle of a sash!" hurrying towards his window, which looked into a small garden, parted by a dead wall from a little private street. His Lordship flung up the sash, put out his head, and immediately exclaimed, "There goes the villain! Run, and alarm the house, and watchmen; he is preparing to scale the wall!" With all his might crying, "Stop thief! stop thief!" while the valet ran down the stairs, and, as quick as possible out of the street-door, but too late to seize the culprit. The watchmen

watchmen were calling the hour without having seen any one!

The servant was hastening back to his master, when the Duke stopped him upon the stairs—"Tell the Earl not to be alarmed, and send my man to me immediately."

The servant hardly knowing either what he did or said, ran up first to his master, who was nearly dressed, and hastily demanded if the robber was taken, and who had stopped him upon the stairs? He answered the last question first.

"Good heavens! give me the light?" said the Earl:—"Sure in God! What did the Duke say?"

"Begged you would not be alarmed, my Lord."

"I am right in my conjecture!" said the Earl, hastening down stairs and into the Duke's room, almost breathless with anxiety.

The Duke was standing near the bed, wrapped in his dressing-gown; his countenance pale, and he seemed in a sort of shuddering chillness! The Earl stood still; his whole

whole frame was so much agitated, that the Duke catching him in his arms before he could speak, "I entreat, my dear Sir, you would lay aside your apprehensions."

"What has happened? What noise was that I heard? What mischief has been done?"

"A man had concealed himself in my bed-room, and has made his escape: the noise you heard was my trying to stop him."

"Gracious God!" said the Earl, "what was the villain's intention? How did he come in? And which way did he make his escape? I saw the wretch leap the wall."

"I will satisfy your curiosity as far as I am able in a few minutes," replied the Duke; leaning, as if for support, against the bed-post: and the Earl saw blood start through his dressing-gown, which he was holding in several folds to his left breast. The poor old man sickened, and would have fallen, if the two valets, who at that moment entered, had not sustained him between them, and bore him to an arm-chair by the bed-side.

They

They gave him a glass of water, and in a few seconds the terror he felt enabled him to say, though in a very faint voice, "Run this moment, Mason, for my surgeon, and bring him with you, or never return."

The servant left the room while his master was speaking, and hastened to execute his orders. By this time the whole house was in alarm, and the servants running up stairs and down. The Duke's valet, who was, as before observed, a very good surgeon, entreated his Grace would set down that he might examine the wound, and stop the effusion of blood that issued from it. The Earl started up; the horror he felt gave him spirits and vigour, and he made the Duke take the chair he had risen from.

His Grace, though he acknowledged he was rather faint, was sure the hurt he had received was by no means dangerous. The servant having removed the dressing-gown, the Earl was almost frantic, dreading, from what he beheld, the Duke would bleed to death before any assistance could be procured.

"A

"A gun-shot wound I perceive," said Nelson, (whose tremor was nearly as great as his Lordship's), "and there appears to me to be a ball lodged in the shoulder."

"I believe you are right," said the Duke; "I know your heart would misgive you if I was to desire you to extract it; and a surgeon will be here by and by; a quarter of an hour more or less can make no difference."

The Earl kept ringing the bell for Lady Gowrie and the housekeeper to send some cordial to prevent the Duke from fainting, and see about getting proper things ready against the surgeon arrived. Between intervals he kept vowing vengeance upon the perpetrator of this atrocious deed, could he but discover who he was; he would spend half his fortune in the attempt.

In a few minutes Lady Gowrie, Mrs. Studeville, Miss St. Aubyn, and Miss Vernon, were at the door, trembling, and each afraid to inquire what had happened. The Earl, with as much composure as he could assume, desired Lady Gowrie would give orders

ders to the housekeeper for what he supposed would be wanted, as the Duke was wounded, he hoped not very dangerously; but he could say no more till the surgeon arrived; they could not see his Grace at present.

Mrs. Studeville was obliged to be supported back into her dressing-room. As soon as she reached it, and had rather recovered the shock she had sustained, she only wondered how she could allow herself to be persuaded to set foot again in such a wicked vile town, where people could not sleep in their beds in safety; and most fervently wished herself once more out of such a horrid place. A thousand conjectures were of course formed by the other ladies, and every room in the house was searched by the Viscountess's orders, for fear any more robbers should still be lurking.

During this bustle, (the natural consequence of the terror every one felt) the Duke having taken a cordial of the housekeeper's prescription, his valet applied a proper styptic, which soon stopped the bleeding. The Earl

Earl would hold the candle; indeed his Grace was averse to any other servant being admitted; but as nothing more could be done till the surgeon came, his Lordship walked towards the window, to discover by what method this execrable villain, as he justly called him, had made his escape. The Duke had observed him stoop to pick something up behind the curtain, and perceived it was a hat, which his Lordship looked at for some seconds by the light he held.

"You may leave me, Nelson, for a minute or two," said his Grace, making him a sign at the same time to be speedy.

The Earl still kept turning and examining the hat, till both that and the candlestick fell from his hands. Unable to speak, he flung himself into the nearest chair. The Duke, who found himself very much recovered, approached, and taking his hand, said, "My dear grandfather, if you have made any unpleasant discovery, (which I am afraid is the case), let me only entreat, as the greatest favour you can ever grant me, or I will ever ask,

that you will not publish your disagreeable conjectures. As soon as time is allowed us, I will offer my advice ; but, for God's sake, your own, mine, and that of the rest of your family, do not let your regard for me, and the impulse of the moment, permit you to lay a foundation for years of repentance."

The Earl pressed the Duke's hand, and tears came to his relief. He answered not a word. In a few seconds his valet came running in from his Lordship's surgeon's, who lived in Pall-mall. As soon as the man could speak, he assured the Earl he had promised to follow him instantly ; and had hardly given in his report before the gentleman made his appearance. The ball was very soon extracted, and the surgeon, as a matter of course, asked what had occasioned such a dreadful accident, assuring his noble patient, and anxious attendants, he did not perceive the slightest danger at present ; presumed the pistol was held close to the Duke—a fortunate circumstance, as it had prevented the ball from having its full force.

No

No one but his Grace was able to answer his question ; who informed him that a robber had concealed himself in his room, and upon his attempting to seize him, had presented a pistol to his breast, and, in their scuffle, it had missed the vital parts.

“ Vile wretch !” exclaimed the surgeon, “ I hope he is secured ?”

“ No, Sir,” said the Duke, “ I fell, and he made his escape !”

The surgeon being satisfied, recommended that his patient should be kept quiet, gave his orders, and took his leave, promising to call again in the course of the forenoon. The favourable report respecting the wound was soon spread ; and the fears the whole house entertained for his Grace’s life began to subside. Farther inquiries continued to be made ; but as yet no one was able to gain any particulars.

The Duke was no sooner in bed than he desired to be left alone with the Earl ; and the moment they were so, the poor old man flung himself upon his knees by the bed-side,
and

and returned thanks to the Giver of all goodness, to whose miraculous interposition alone he attributed the narrow escape of his beloved grandson! then intreated his Grace to be candid with him, as he had not a doubt respecting the perpetrator of the horrid deed, and, but for the Duke's timely precaution, he should now have been, God willing, in the hands of justice!"

"That was what I was afraid of, my dear Sir," said the Duke; "I will conceal nothing from you, and we will then consult together what is proper to be done. Within a quarter of an hour after I had taken leave of your Lordship, I was in bed. I cannot say I was very sleepy, though I chanced to lie remarkably still, and should most likely have forgot myself in a few minutes, if I had not fancied I heard something breathe. I listened for some time, then persuaded myself I was mistaken; yet, at intervals, the sound was still distinct. In this state of uncertainty I lay for half an hour, or more; at last thought it must be either a cat or dog, for I was con-

fidest there must be something, and was upon the point several times of ringing my bell ; but fearful of disturbing the family, I affected to sleep, thinking, if it was any human being, it might prompt them to emerge from their concealment. For some time all was quiet ; but at length I heard something move from under my bed. If it was an animal, as I had supposed, I should be easily able to turn it out ; and if it was a robber, I should soon discover his intentions, which could be hardly more than to get possession of my watch and money, and these he most likely knew where to find in the next room ; and as I was in total darkness and without arms, I thought I might have reason to repent were I too precipitate. Notwithstanding the caution with which the person stepped, I soon found it was neither dog nor cat, and tried to watch their movements by my ear, and as gently as possible put by the curtain. Though I had not the least glimmering of light, presently I perceived the window curtain move, and the moment after the shutters. I then

saw, by the imperfect day-light through the curtain, the figure of a man standing behind it. Thinking he wished to see what he was about, I allowed him to put by both shutters; but instead of returning, as I supposed he would, to seek what plunder he meant to carry away, he began to raise the sash very gently. Confident now, in my own mind, he had secured his booty, and only wanted to make his escape, concluding he had a ladder ready for that purpose, I sprung out of bed, and seized him before he had raised the sash half high enough to admit him to get out.— ‘Villain!’ said I, ‘I have you.’ What was my astonishment, when behind the curtain, to meet the eyes of Lord Gowrie!—I started back, and at the same moment he levelled a pistol at my breast: in my effort to ward it off I received its contents in my shoulder, and instantly fell. Could I have recovered my legs, he had already made his escape by a rope, which, on examination you will find had been previously fastened for that purpose. Nothing more passed than I have re-

lated :—what so premeditated a plan was to have ended in, I am at a loss to comprehend.”

The Earl, who had set very calm during this recital, now spoke —

“ And can your Grace think any thing too bad for such a monster? Should not we be accountable to our Maker were we to screen such a villain from the punishment due to his crimes?—I am convinced he purposely flung me overboard, when you so generously exposed your own life to save mine! But that I should much sooner have forgiven him than this last horrid attempt. What his intentions really were I cannot even fathom. But what does your Grace mean to advise?”

“ I think there is very little doubt, my Lord, but the wretched being is now upon his road to the Continent : he is conscious I discovered him, and as he cannot have any assurance whether he killed me upon the spot, he must know he has every thing to dread from my being able to ascertain the assassin ; he will also, no doubt, remember he left his hat behind ; and that would, at all events,

events, be presumptive proof against him. I therefore think there is every reason to suppose he will seek his safety in flight; and we could not inflict a more severe punishment upon him than self-banishment will prove under such circumstances; and I wish him to be allowed time to leave the kingdom. However, if (which I can hardly suppose) he rests his security upon supposing me no more, and should brave the impending storm, I should wish him to be sent for in the course of the morning; I will then turn accuser, and will hear what he can possibly have to alledge in his justification, as I am not at all satisfied in my own mind respecting his real intentions. By his being armed, and having concerted his escape, they were probably of the most atrocious nature: yet he was apparently endeavouring to make his escape at the moment I seized him; or did he wish to prepare every thing for that purpose before he put an end to my life?—Yet what end was his taking my life to answer? he could not have been my heir.”

“Upon

"Upon reflection, my dear grandson, I am happy to think it was certainly my life, not your's, the abandoned wretch meant to take. This is the apartment I always occupied; and as I ordered my household to keep my removal a secret lest you should object to take possession of it, he was most probably ignorant of my having changed my quarters; therefore you find I am, in some respects, once more indebted to you for my life!"

"I am afraid your inferences are but too well founded, my dear Sir," answered the Duke; "he is therefore, if possible, more guilty than I at first imagined, though I rejoice most sincerely I have been even so unintentionally the means of saving your life. Perhaps if I had not attempted to seize him, the vile being might have made his escape without firing his pistol. But why not have thrown himself upon my mercy, or have found some excuse for his concealment, without endeavouring to murder me to save himself from detection? Misguided, deluded wretch!"

wretch! what a miserable existence thine must henceforth be!"

The Earl knowing too much talking would fatigue the Duke, rose, intreating him to endeavour to take a little repose, adding, he would send his valet to receive his orders, and to watch by his bed-side; one of the other servants should sit in the dressing-room, and he would go and invent the most plausible story he could for the ladies.

He found them assembled in Mrs. Studenville's dressing-room, who by way of enlivening them, was repeating every story of robberies or murders she had ever heard!—

The Earl seemed so deeply afflicted, they were afraid the Duke was worse than they had been given to understand: he calmed their apprehensions in some respects; and in answer to the old lady's repeated questions, told her, "that a robber, taking advantage, no doubt, of the bustle the house had been in over-night, had, unknown to the servants, concealed himself in the Duke's apartment; and that his Grace, in trying to secure him,
had

had met with the wound they had so much reason to deplore :” adding, “ he had seen the man make his escape, and had likewise endeavoured, though equally unsuccessful, to have him stopped.”

Mrs. Studeville inveighed against the carelessness of servants, watchmen, &c. protested people were more exposed in London in their own houses, nay in their beds, than they were upon Durdham Downs ; and yet that was looked upon as an unsafe place to cross after dark : and could not refrain from hinting, that this mischief had, in a great measure, sprung from countenancing improper diversions on a Sunday evening ! The Earl was not in spirits to argue her out of such absurd notions, therefore only advised her and the other ladies to return to bed for a few hours, as he meant to do the same, and left them to follow his advice or not, as best suited their inclination.

END OF VOL. II.



